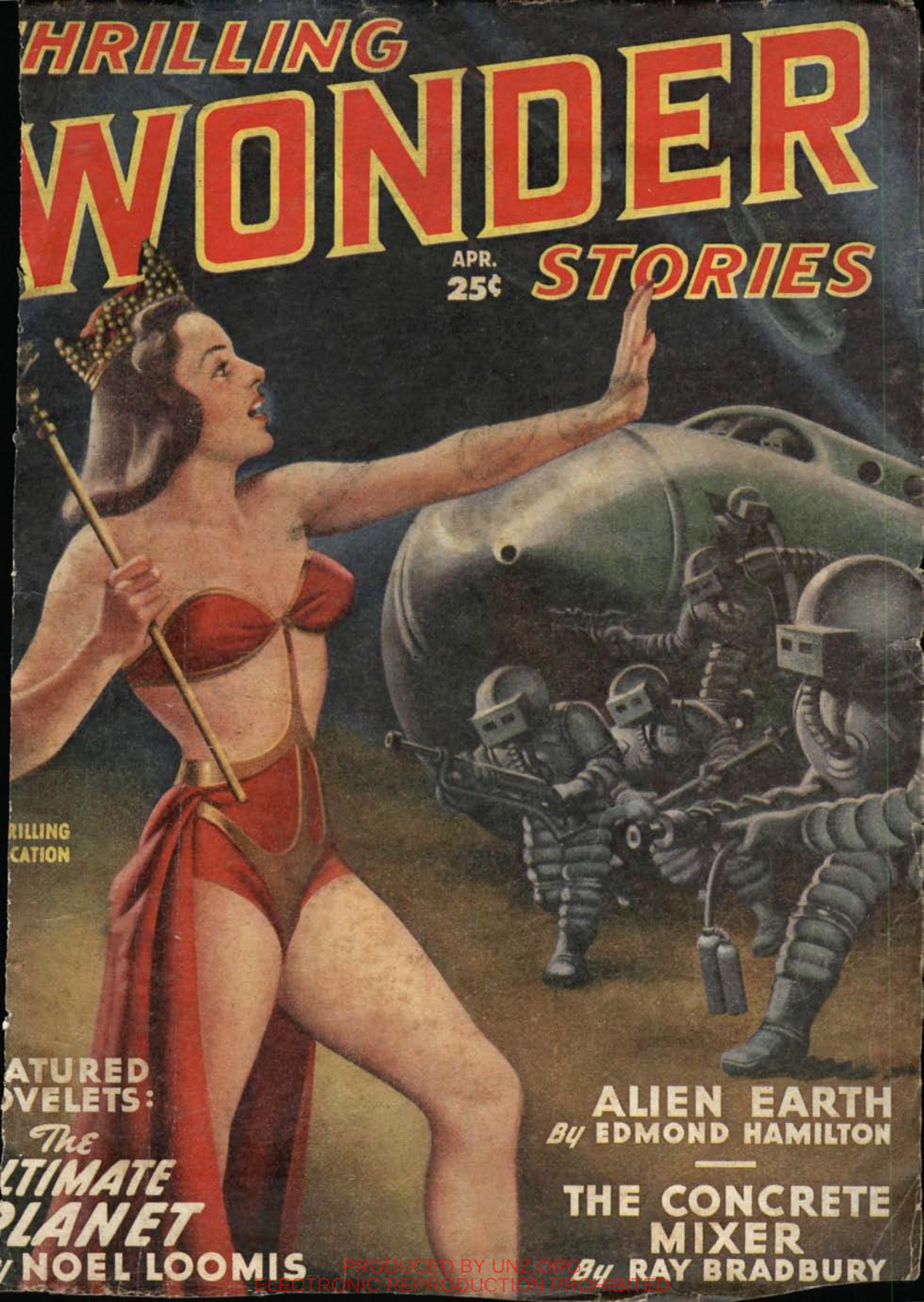

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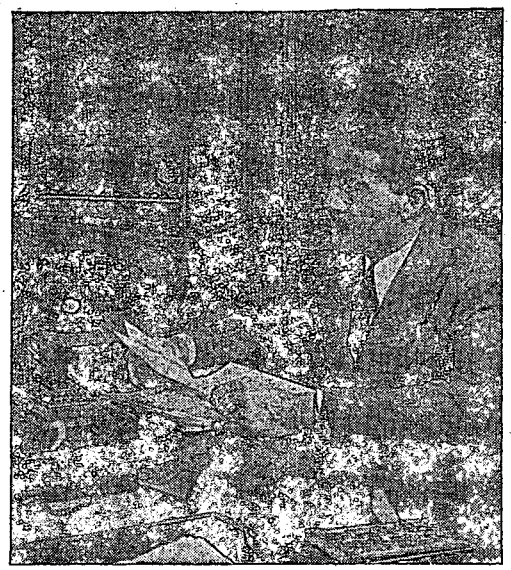

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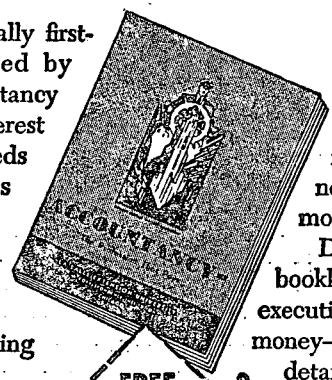

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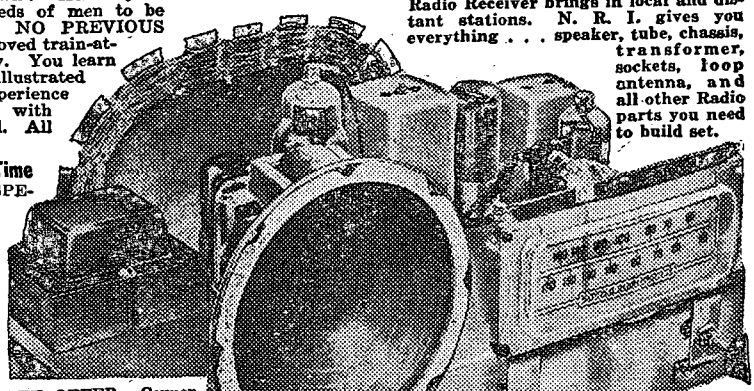

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## A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

IF we accept the curious human faculty of imagination as one of the basic senses we come up with some very strange results. The pictures which all of us receive from our imaginations are, for reasons which psychologists and psychiatrists are still seeking to analyze, at least as distorted as those resulting from any camera lacking the as-yet uninvented universal focus.

All of us are familiar with front-face photographs of horses in which the beasts look to be all head and neck—or pictures of humans who appear to be possessors of gargantuan feet and heads so small as to defy the efforts of even a Coney Island pin engraver to put the Lord's prayer on them. The camera is generally accepted as accurate although it is anything but.

Occasionally, through the trickery or error of the photographer the camera can put things into its reproductions of real scenes that are not there—as witness montage effects, double exposures and so-called "spirit" photographs.

Our imaginations seem to delight in doing the same things.

### Trickery of the Subconscious

Basically, however, when we are taking pictures with our imaginations, the unreal things we add are the results of intense desires upon our part—call them wish fulfillments if you will. They are never the result of error, for the mind is a far more accurate recorder than any combination of lens and film.

They represent, then, the trickery of the subconscious.

When the human being wants something long enough and hard enough and in sufficient numbers, he has a way of getting it. To this extent, the distortions of our imaginations frequently prove to be prophetic.

Some of our desires are intensely destructive to self and others. Those who "saw" Orson Welles' "Martians" after that famous broadcast in 1938 and those who "saw" so many, many "flying saucers" were probably the victims of fear—fear rooted in deep destructive desires based on some innate sense of guilt. It is such fears, become desires, that cause most of our countless human troubles of past and present.

### New Vistas of Progress

However, praise Allah, not all of our desires are of such nature. If they were the world would be a lot sorrier place than it is today—despite its overall wretchedness. We want a lot of things that represent progress and, as each such desire is fulfilled in fact, it opens up whole new vistas for wishing.

Men—mostly isolated in time and space from their fellow wishers—longed for boats that could travel underwater, among them the early Americans Bushnell and Fulton, both of whom built submarines that might have been effective had their dreams been more generally shared to inspire wider support.

It took Jules Verne with his *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and a whole slue of industrial-age discoveries to widen the dream to the point where Holland and Lake could build the first practical undersea boats. But it is our private hunch that, had enough men wanted the submarine at the time, it could and would have been evolved far sooner.

The ancient Greeks understood perfectly the steam engine and the application of steam

*(Continued on page 8)*



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## THE READER SPEAKS

*(Continued from page 6)*

power. But not many people in that far-off era had the slightest use or wish for it. So their discovery was allowed to gather dust in libraries for more than two thousand years.

### The Dream of Space-Flight

If enough people really want something, they'll get it, whether it is in the "picture" of reality or not. Sooner or later they'll put it there. The airplane, of course, is a classic case and, evolving from it, the dream of space-ships and space-flight.

Closely correlated to this dream is the wish to create power from the atom. For once solar distances were understood, the need for tremendous and endless power to span them became incorporated into the space-dream. Today we are perhaps closer than we know to reaching the Moon and the planets of our sun.

These recent developments in human wish-fulfillment have, as usual, opened wide the gates to further and greater dreams. To the minds of many science fiction readers and others the planets have already been visited and, where surface conditions permit it, colonized.

In the imaginations of these prophetic dreamers the Solar System is already crowded and our scientists have devised a method of reaching the other systems of our galaxy. To do this a manner of transportation swifter than light itself must be developed, for the stars range from a few to perhaps millions of light-years away.

### The "Overdrive"

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It is doubtful, to say the least, that any of us now living will see such a development in fact. Those who dream of it, like the Greek steam-engine inventors, are dreaming a couple of steps ahead of the great game of human progress. But if enough of us dream long enough and hard enough it's a very sound long-term bet that something like it will come in time. Dreams can be powerful

*(Continued on page 10)*



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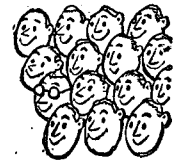

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# THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

medicine as the unfortunates of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—those still alive—can tell us.

There is, however, one distortion in the dream of reaching planets far from Earth that we feel rates attention. This is the casual manner in which such worlds are charted and colonized. In many cases our writers share and have long shared in this distortion. Men land on a new planet and—blip!—the job is done. The new lands quickly become oversettled and Man must move on.

When we stop dreaming for a moment and realize that large parts of Earth's oceans, islands and continents have yet to know the recorded footsteps of any men and have yet to echo to the motors of a plane passing overhead, we realize that the job is not going to move as rapidly as many of us seem to expect.

## Charting the Planets

Even with scientific development moving at its ever-accelerating speed, it will take generations to chart small planets such as Mars and Venus. If they prove habitable for humans it will take centuries to pack them to overflowing. Mere observation and discovery on an interplanetary and, perhaps, intragalactic scale is a project vastly greater than Man has yet attempted.

However, Man wants to attempt it. He wants to reach the planets and the stars. So it's odds-on that he will get there if his destructive impulses don't cause him to destroy himself first. The point he must keep in mind before he involves himself in terrestrial squabbles for room and rule is that there is going to be a lot of space to move around in when he gets there.

Man will almost certainly reach his goal but he is going to have to learn to get on with his fellows if he is to enjoy it very much or for very long! All of us would do well to incorporate this thought into our dreams of space.

---

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

COMES June—comes Leigh Brackett with her first science fiction novel in too long a time, SEA-KINGS OF MARS. This is truly

(Continued on page 141)



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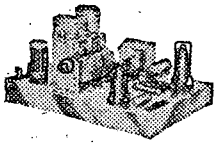

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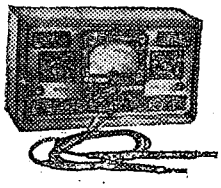

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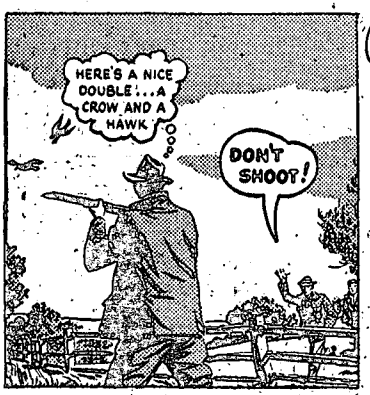
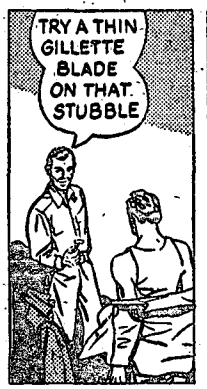
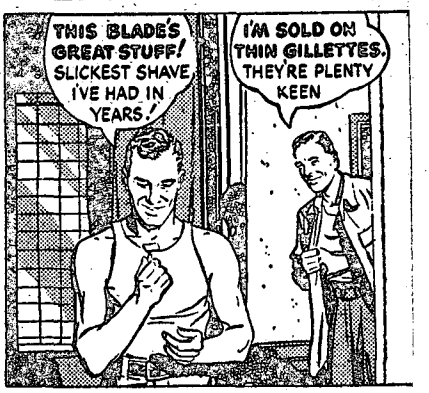
# HUNTING HAWK MISSES HIS KILL BUT THEN...

FALCONRY, AN ANCIENT SPORT, STILL SURVIVES AND BEN DAIL IS SHOWING HIS SISTER HOW IT'S DONE



AND SO AFTER A DAY-LONG CROW HUNT WITH HAWK AND GUN...



SO IF YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO'S LOOKING FOR A TURBO-JET EXPERT
WHY, BEN! UNCLE BOB HAS BEEN COMBING THE COUNTRY FOR MEN LIKE DICK
HE'S HANDSOME

MEN, WHEN IT COMES TO EXTRA SHAVING COMFORT, PLUS ECONOMY, YOU CAN'T BEAT THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER AND LAST LONGER THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICE BLADES. YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION, TOO, FOR THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT NEW 10-BLADE PACKAGE
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There was something of the primitive caveman about McAvity

*Human and alien realities clash on far-distant Stygia, where science wars on freedom—until the Grunk cometh!*

# the ULTIMATE PLANET

## CHAPTER I

*Dangerous Knowledge*

DR. WILLIAM CUSP got out of the gyrocab in ancient Times Square and started to walk away.

"Mister," the pilot called, "didn't you forget something?"

Dr. Cusp turned only far enough to toss the man a platinum coin. He didn't look at the man's face and he didn't wait for change. He was bored enough by those of his own class; he certainly wouldn't allow a gyro pilot to bother him. He went on to the escalator and rode up to the moving sidewalk on the second level.

He took the cane from his arm and leaned on it as he moved along, pretending to study the stars. That puerile paper that M.

complete novelet by NOEL LOOMIS



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Flandreau, the Belgian delegate, had given tonight on beta particles! Flandreau was no credit to the Science Party; he ought to be suspended. Flandreau was a rank extrovert.

Cusp was one of the few men living capable of judging Flandreau, for Cusp undoubtedly had one of the most intellectually rarefied minds in the world. He held the chair in fission at the great Presidents' University—the youngest full professor of sub-atomics on Earth; he had a string of degrees and plenty of money. Nothing bothered him but persons—especially persons of the Peoples Party, which included ninety-nine per cent of Earth's population.

A hand touched Cusp's arm. A voice said, "Sorry, sir, you forgot your change."

Cusp snorted, then drew himself up haughtily. "My dear sir," he said in precise nasal French, "I'm sure I don't know you at all."

"I'm the gyro pilot, sir." The man put a stack of gold coins into Cusp's hand, touched the brim of his cap, and stepped across to the half of the belt that moved in the opposite direction.

Cusp was indignant, then he realized it was strange that a member of the Peoples Party had understood archaic French, and he was puzzled. Also he had been spoken to as if the gyro pilot were an equal, and that was unforgivable. One didn't expect to find higher education in the Peoples Party; one expected to be governed by sheer force of numbers, but that certainly did not include being spoken to as if they were equals.

There was a light on his videocast recorder when he reached his apartment; his deaf-mute valet turned it on before he left with Cusp's hat and coat.

CUSP heard the message. He scowled. Then he left the apartment, went up to the penthouse on the ninety-first floor. He heard the black-light beam announce him, then Lanschoten, International Chairman of the Science Party, opened the door.

"My dear Cusp, come in." The fellow was much too effusive. "You don't read the papers, do you?"

"Never," said Cusp. "In a world unfortunately run by those who contribute least to it, I don't care for the vulgar reports of a controlled publicity bureau interspersed with political propaganda and spiced with the latest doings of sensation-seekers."

"I can't say that I blame you."

"People bore me—even at their best, and so I don't care to read about them. I'm not interested in people, but only in science. Scientific problems are never boring. They are always logical and leave one free of hampering emotions."

Lanschoten answered, "We counted on that."

"What?" Cusp asked sharply.

Lanschoten switched on the video playback. "Listen to this."

"Lhasa, June Twenty, Twenty-Three-Fifteen—B. J. Hunter announced today from headquarters of the Terrestrial Council in Lhasa that the council is asking volunteers for a twenty-year vigil on Stygia, recently discovered outermost planet from the sun."

Cusp frowned and listened. The broadcast continued:

"The newest planet, five billion miles from the sun, came into the limelight as Hunter announced that a communication on the gravitational beam from the constellation Hercules, advises that the inhabitants of Planet VII of the star Iota in the constellation Orion, who may possess the secret of instantaneous transmission, are preparing for a solar expedition."

Cusp waited.

"The Hercules message gave no specific details, and due to the fact that it takes seven years even for an audio message to make the round trip, the Terrestrial Council is acting at once to establish an outpost on Stygia, which for the next three years will be accessible from Uranus.

"Stygia is known to be a large planet of violent extremes. It was discovered only ten years ago as a result of predictions made by Professor William Cusp from his observations on the paths of beta and other particles in sub-atomic states."

Cusp reached to turn off the recorder, but a comment from Lanschoten stopped him. Lanschoten said, "The council asks for volunteers, one from each of the two major parties, for the twenty years' vigil, during which time the outpost will serve as a detection station for invasion of the Solar System. It is expected that Stygia's great distance from Earth will provide ample time for warning and preparation of defenses if such an invasion should occur."

Lanschoten leaned forward and continued, "Dr. Cusp, you know the history of the check-and-balance system. The Science

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Cobalt snow filled the cab and McAvity was frozen solid, with the Grunk on his shoulder



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Party has had all of the science but none of the power for three hundred years now because every discovery we make, everything we do, has to be turned over to the administration and becomes the property of the entire world."

Cusp nodded. "We do the hard work, then they grab it away from us," he said sourly. "Everything we do is for the people. There isn't much personal incentive."

"There would be," Lanschoten said sharply, "if we could develop some one important discovery and control the use of it ourselves."

Cusp's eyes grew narrow. They looked hard at Lanschoten. "It is indeed a blot on the Earth," he said, "that the scientists, those who have been responsible for all of Earth's progress, allowed control of affairs to be taken from them, but if a scientist had, for instance, twenty years of comparative freedom to work out something for himself, he might put the Science Party in a position to regain the eminence it held back in the Atomic Age."

Lanschoten said, "With twenty years of uninterrupted work, the right man might be able to work out a process for instantaneous transmission. He might even contact the creatures from Orion and learn the secret from them." Lanschoten leaned forward. "They have asked for volunteers, but the Science Party is taking no chance, Dr. Cusp. The wrong man can bungle things. The right man might accomplish a great deal. So the directors of the party feel that we must send the very best man we have—one who can work for us, and also one who can keep an eye on the Peoples Party man, to see that he doesn't try to put over anything. In a word, Doctor Cusp, we are asking you, as the greatest mind of the party, to volunteer."

CUSP bowed slightly.

"It is common knowledge that you like to be alone," Lanschoten went on, "and so perhaps that aspect of the situation would be no problem for you. Also, of course, our man must be absolutely trustworthy. If the knowledge of instantaneous transmission is acquired by our man on Stygia, that knowledge will be practically a personal possession until such time as he can return to Earth. A man with that information could be a dictator."

Cusp stared at him. "You are right!" he answered. "Knowledge like that must never be allowed to fall into the hands of any representative of the Peoples Party. With such knowledge a man could single-handedly rule the Solar System. That's too much power to put in the hands of relatively uneducated men, such as the masses in the Peoples Party."

"You may not know," said Lanschoten, "but there is a movement on foot for a revision of the Treaty to give Peoples Party members the right of entrance to scientific schools. That's a pet project of John McAvity."

"That must not be done," Cusp said emphatically. Then he added thoughtfully, "If they've gotten to the point where they are asking for that, then it is high time for us to do something. We don't dare to start educating them in science. They aren't ready for it."

"They maintain," Lanschoten said pointedly, "that the basic aspects of character are more important than education. McAvity's argument is that a person is what he is born—that education has nothing to do with it. He contends that you can pick any ordinary laboring man off the streets or any scientist from the laboratory and give him a potentially powerful secret, and what he will do with it, whether he will use it for the good of humanity or for himself, will depend not on his ethical education but on his inherited tendencies."

Cusp snorted. "Propaganda. Suppose you took a gyrocab pilot, for example, and taught him the principles of the anti-parallel axis, so that he could counteract gravity without scientific help. Do you think he would maintain the high standards of the Science Party?" Cusp snorted again. "I ran across a particularly odious one tonight. He even followed me to give me my change—intruded himself on me. What would a man like that do with knowledge of cosmic-ray generation? He'd probably try to figure out how he could rule the Earth."

"Quite likely," said Lanschoten.

"And I'll tell you this." Dr. Cusp was thoroughly warmed up now. "I don't trust even the lower ranks of the Science Party. I could have worked out the problem of instantaneous transmission on the differential analyzer at the University some years ago, but I didn't dare, because others would have seen what I was doing, and presently it would have become the property of the

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masses. No, my dear Lanschoten, such knowledge is not for people like those. They're not stable enough in the face of temptation."

"Well," said Lanschoten, "I'm glad we understand each other. The Board has chosen the man who, we feel, is the outstanding man from our party for the outpost on Stygia. This is a chance to recover some of the power we have lost. Dr. Cusp, that man is you. Will you volunteer?"

Cusp raised his eyebrows and looked searchingly at Lanschoten. Yes, they understood each other, but he shouldn't be too eager.

"It's a heavy responsibility," he said presently. "I'll let you know in a couple of days."

"Thanks," said Lanschoten, as if it were settled.

Dr. Cusp, too, knew what he would do when he walked out of Lanschoten's door, and he was so engrossed in figuring out the implications that he neglected to say goodnight.

## CHAPTER II

### *Outer Planet*

HE WAS elated as he stepped onto the walkway. For one thing, he could get away from people—and people bored him—people with their never-ending round of petty problems. They were the same problems that people had been stewing about for thousands of years—love, hate, ambition, and Cusp was extremely tired of it. He'd be glad to get to a place where he wouldn't have to contend with a world of neurotics who had no right to inflict their juvenile problems on his attention.

For another thing, Dr. Cusp had been wanting to work out the problem of instantaneous transmission for years, but he hadn't dared. He didn't want it to get into the wrong hands. But if he should go to Stygia, with twenty years and no one around but an uneducated Peoples Party man, he could work it out and have it for himself. Then, if the Peoples Party should still be causing trouble by their demands, he, Dr. Cusp, would have a hand in the revision of the Treaty.

Dr. Cusp was keenly aware that for ten generations all scientists, in view of the education to be given them and the danger of their knowledge in a modern world, had subscribed to the Manhattan Oath—never to use such knowledge for selfish ends, and never to demand a part in government. That had been the chief result of the World Rebellion and the Treaty of 1999—separation of science and government. But in an emergency, sometimes stringent measures were necessary, and Dr. Cusp wanted to be ready to take those measures. Dr. Cusp felt quite sure that, in dealing with the relatively uneducated members of the Peoples Party, anything might happen.

He notified Lanschoten a few days later that he would accept.

Lanschoten thanked him, and said, "I'm glad you're going. The Peoples man is John McAvity."

"I don't know who the fellow is."

"He's international chairman of the Peoples Party—a more powerful man than the president of the Terrestrial Council."

"The international chairman," Cusp said thoughtfully. "That puts a new slant on the whole thing, doesn't it?"

"I thought you'd see that."

"It means that they see the opportunities, too. They're sending the very best man they can produce. Well, don't worry about it Lanschoten. I can put that kind of person in his place."

"McAvity," said Lanschoten. "is the chief advocate of scientific learning for the Peoples Party."

Cusp dismissed the idea. "Education like that would be wasted on the masses. Let them stick to practical things such as finance and government. Who knows what men like that would do with a little scientific knowledge? What would have happened back in the Twentieth Century, for instance, if one of the powerful labor leaders had discovered the secret of counteracting gravity?"

"This is serious," Lanschoten insisted. "They aren't sending their international chairman as an idle gesture. This will be a finish fight."

"Never mind. I'll take care of McAvity. How could a Peoples Party man do anything in the way of experimentation on such a problem, anyway?"

Dr. Cusp gave no more thought to McAvity for the next six months. He was quite busy preparing for the trip.

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Stygia's tremendous distance—almost five billion miles—made an approach to it a problem. From Earth the trip would require eighteen months, but the extreme limit of range for ether-ships of any type was in the neighborhood of three and a quarter billion miles. It did not matter how small or how big the load, at the end of enough hours' use to carry a ship that far and back, the gammatron chambers of the atomic engines could be expected to disintegrate at any time.

The heavy machinery required for generation of the nine-thousand-degree heat necessary to fuse new tungsten linings into place could not be operated safely on board ship, so the trip from Earth to Stygia and back could not be made in one hop.

UNTIL twenty-two years later, the only planet from which Stygia could be reached was Uranus, and that would be possible for the next three years only. For that period of time Uranus would be traveling thirteen degrees of its orbit while Stygia would be traversing an arc of only three degrees, and Uranus, being near the limit of range anyway, would rapidly draw out of reach. Actually, man had less than three years to reach Stygia from Uranus, for the traveling time involved between the two was nearly twelve months, so the last ship to return to Uranus for Earth would have to leave Stygia within two years.

So for Cusp and McAvity there was a training period of six months and a traveling time of eighteen months. They would have to stay on Stygia until the next approach of Neptune, nineteen years later. Pluto was on the other side of the sun and would not be back for a hundred years.

The outpost would have to have enormous quantities of supplies, so in the next six months several slow freighters were dispatched for Jupiter. A headquarters dome and five smaller domes to house the substations of automatic reporting instruments, were made of nylax, stronger and tougher and more elastic than beryllium steel, but transparent. These were made on the moon, in one piece, and towed to Stygia for dropping into place.

The domes had to be protected from the intense atomic activity in Stygia's interior, which erupted from the surface in one quadrant of the big planet. At such times great storms of pure energy would sweep around the 340,000 miles of Stygia's circumference like a titanic wind, stopping everything with which they came in contact. Under such an impact electricity behaved erratically, liquids ceased to flow—even the blood in a man's veins—and the oxygen in a breathing unit would not flow from its container.

Cusp devised a modern version of the DeGaussing system for the domes, the communications cables, the oxysuits they would wear outside of the domes, and the cabs of the vehicles they would use for transportation.

Atomic engines were particularly susceptible to gamma radiations, so the supply ships for Stygia were equipped by Atompowerinc with auxiliaries of obsolete internal-combustion engines from the 1980's. Even these blanked out during a severe gamma blast, but they could be started in a moment or two, and they furnished heat to combat the intense cold, which sometimes dropped to within ten degrees of Kelvin zero.

Cusp saw all reports of the ships as they returned to base on Uranus. In the placing and anchoring of the domes and the building of warehouses, and in trans-shipping thousands of tons of supplies, twenty-eight men were lost: two to the cold, three in accidents, six from suffocation, and nineteen from exposure to gamma discharges.

In the meantime, scientists on the Terrestrial Council staff designed some unusual equipment to assure that whatever might happen to the two men in their twenty years on Stygia, Earth persons would be guaranteed all possible information as to what the two would have learned on Stygia or as to whatever might happen to destroy the men or even the outpost itself.

They made apparatus to record a constant visual and auditory log of everything that should take place at the instrument bench in the headquarters dome for the entire twenty years. They supplied enough microwire to make the recordings, and connected the recorder so that all gauge readings and automatic signals from the sub-stations would go on the wire, as well as all sight and sound that might pass over the video between the dome and the operator of the snow caterpillar when it should be outside of the dome.

In case of an invasion of some sort by alien creatures, or a cataclysm of nature that would destroy the dome and the two men,

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Earth scientists would still be assured of a complete record up to the very time the microwire should stop running.

THE thousands of spools of fine wire were arranged so that, as each spool was used, the wire would run directly into a tiny tungsten vault that was indestructible, infusible, and unloseable. A small uranium core would emit emanations that would be detectable for seventy million years, so that even if the entire planet should be blown up, Earth scientists could still find the vaults somewhere in the galaxy if they should look carefully enough. As each vault was removed from the recorder it sealed itself instantaneously, or if for any reason the recorder should stop, the vault would seal itself then too. And once sealed, no vault could be opened except with some sort of secret equipment that was kept on Earth.

Not even Cusp was told how the vaults could be opened, to forestall any sort of entity that might try to extract the secret from his mind. He suspected that there was some combination of vibration frequencies that would shatter the vaults with fatigue, but this might be a combination of anything or everything from sound waves with a frequency of thirty vibrations per second to cosmic rays with a frequency of three hundred sextillion waves per second, so that without the key, there would be no possibility of hitting on the right combination even if billions of researchers should be employed for billions of years.

Cusp saw the survey reports of the IBI on Stygia. The one third of the planet where the surface was broken was like a boiling sore, often molten, and always violently volcanic, with great masses of super-heated metallic vapors pouring forth, and tremendous discharges of atomic energy.

Few of the lighter elements were detectable on Stygia. Apparently these had been lost by vaporization and centrifugal inertia. The vitality surveys showed no life whatever on Stygia. That pleased Cusp.

It was July 9, 2344, when they were set down in the perpetual night of Stygia exactly on time.

They stepped out on the frozen osmium tetroxide ground, and, through the trans-

The cyclonic vapor storm hurled Cusp into outer space

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parent face of his oxysuit, Cusp saw McAvity grin. He heard him say, over the inter-mike:

"Looks rugged."

Cusp didn't bother to answer. He went in through the air-lock of the headquarters dome, with McAvity behind him. Their baggage was going in through the freight-lock. Cusp took off his suit and made a quick survey. The dome was roomy, well lighted and well heated by the atomic engine. Cusp gave the IBI commander a receipt. The officer saluted, said "Good luck, see you in twenty years." turned on his heel, and went into the air-lock. Ten minutes later the jet-jumper had gone back to the mother-ship.

## CHAPTER III

### *Research*

CUSP spent some time looking over the mass of dials and lights. Then he turned to outline to McAvity his first duties.

The actual division of duties, of course, had been made on Earth. Cusp was in charge of technical equipment and reports, while McAvity's principal duties were operation of the equipment and periodical inspection and maintenance trips to the outlying substations. But Cusp wanted to start off things right by putting McAvity in his place, so he wheeled around, expecting to find McAvity standing there, waiting for instructions.

But McAvity wasn't there.

Cusp was only slightly annoyed. He didn't see McAvity, so he set the ear-phones more tightly on his head and turned back to the long bench. He was listening intently to the signal of the transaudio selector from Station 2, when an awful noise came from behind him. He jumped and almost knocked over the Vaulet counter. The noise grew into a tremendous clatter and then a thunderous roar that filled the dome with sound. Cusp jerked off his ear-phones and stalked into the back room.

He saw the two big snow-caterpillars there and he finally realized that the gasoline engine of one of them was running. Just as he understood that, McAvity raised up from behind the engine. He had grease on his face. He saw Cusp standing there and he grinned. He turned off the ignition and the engine stopped.

"Some engine," he said. He looked down the length of the fearful mechanism and his eyes actually glowed. "Good old Susie," he said, patting the metal cover as if it were animate. "We're going to get along swell."

"I hope it won't be necessary," said Cusp, "to operate it inside the dome very often."

McAvity looked at him. The grin left McAvity's face. For an instant he looked disappointed, as if he actually had expected Cusp to be friendly once they should be on Stygia. Then all the feeling left his face, and his eyes, watching Cusp's eyes, became quite impersonal.

Cusp said significantly: "I'm Dr. William Cusp."

"I know," said McAvity. "I've seen you before."

Cusp stared at him. "Where, pray tell?"

"I've sat in on a number of your lectures."

"Aren't you a Peoples Party man?"

"Yes, I'm international chairman—or was."

"Then you were spying!"

"No, I felt it was my duty to keep posted on what the other side was doing, and that wasn't too difficult, because the Treaty provides for it."

Cusp looked at him suspiciously. "Where did you get enough background to understand my lectures?"

McAvity grinned. "I will admit they were over my head at first—for instance, your fifth lecture on the quantum of action."

Cusp was astounded. "Do you mean that eventually you understood it?"

"Well, not until after I had studied the available books for some years."

"Apparently, then, you made a habit of hearing my lectures."

"Yes. Why else do you suppose I always had my gyrocab so handy to take you home?"

"You?"

"Yes. I took you home the very night this outpost was announced. You gave me a platinum coin. Remember?"

Cusp was looking through him now. "I have never," he said, "made a habit of chumming with taxi pilots."

"I know," said McAvity quietly.

Cusp stared over his head. "The international chairman a taxi pilot!" he said icily.

McAvity slowly turned pink. "It's a good way to learn about people—and people them-

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selves are the most important study there is," he said defensively.

Cusp turned on his heel and went back. *Susie!* McAvity had spoken of the engine as if it were a person—and a female person, at that. Cusp was disgusted. Was he marooned with a perpetual juvenile?

IT WASN'T long, however, before the disgust gave way to wariness. McAvity had been hearing his lectures, and had understood his fifth on the quantum of action. Why, even Lanschoten had asked for Cusp's notes so he could figure it all out.

It scared Cusp, when he got to thinking about it. He'd better not take anything for granted around McAvity. He would have to be particularly careful with his experiments and his calculations. He wished the Council had sent a bigger analyzer, so he wouldn't have some problems on it for several days at a time.

He went ahead and set up his problems, and for a few months it seemed McAvity wouldn't be any trouble at all. He spent a great deal of time tinkering with the Tornado engine, and his regarding of the engine as a person rather than an inanimate piece of mechanism seemed to grow rather than lessen.

It relieved Cusp, but at the same time it annoyed him that the man was so confounded proud of his ability to produce power from an obsolete gasoline engine. Cusp preferred an atomic engine like the one that lighted and heated the dome and furnished their power. It had no moving parts. It was noiseless and there was no fire or light or anything but the Faulson gauge to show that the engine was producing energy.

John McAvity definitely was an atavism. Over his oxysuit he would button his old-fashioned greatcoat and put on an absurd sort of helmet that he called a stocking-cap, with a vain and useless ball of yarn at the top, and drive the snow-cat into the Stygian night behind the thirty-two cylinders of the Tornado engine as though he enjoyed it.

What annoyed Cusp the most, however, was McAvity's self-possession and adaptability. Cusp treated him very coldly. It should have brought at least a remonstrance from McAvity—but it didn't. He merely got chummier with the engine.

One day Cusp's stomach was upset and McAvity brought him some medicine from the dispensary just before he left on a trip.

"Thanks," Cusp said.

"That's okay," said McAvity.

When McAvity came back two days later, he drove the cat into the air-lock and then into the garage. A half hour passed and he did not come into the main room of the dome. An hour passed and Cusp went back to look. At first he didn't see McAvity, but then he noticed the hood was up over one section of the engine, and he saw McAvity bending down inside.

"Susie, old girl," Cusp heard him say, "you're like a letter from home. Never let me down."

Cusp cleared his throat.

There was immediate silence, as if McAvity wished he had not been caught talking to the engine. Finally McAvity raised his head out of the nest of gadgets:

"Giving Susie a little polishing up," he said. "If I ever get stuck outside there, I'll be a goner. So I keep her sweetened up."

What was the man talking for? To cover his embarrassment?

"You might exhibit some interest in the welfare of your colleague," Cusp said coldly. "After all, there are only two human beings on this entire planet."

A different light came in McAvity's eyes. Cusp had a fleeting impression that it was almost a look of contempt.

"You're not supposed to be anachronistic," Cusp went on. He unexpectedly felt impelled to defend himself. "Your attitude belongs in the Twentieth Century, when man worshiped the gasoline engine."

McAvity's look turned to one almost of pity. He still did not answer.

Cusp stalked away. He went back to the analyzer and began to set up the last phase of the first section of his mathematical work on transmission. Ordinarily he would have waited until McAvity's next trip, but that was a week away, and Cusp was impatient to finish this section. Besides, he was disturbed, and he wanted something to keep him busy. Anyway, surely McAvity wouldn't be able to figure it out.

THAT turned out to be a mistake. Unexpectedly McAvity came into the analyzer room two days later. "The bell was ringing on the spherometer at Number Two," he explained. "You must have been pretty deep in your work."

Cusp frowned. Yes, he *was* deep. He wished McAvity would leave—at once, but

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McAvity wandered around looking at the figures on the totalizators, and Cusp could almost see the man's damned mechanical brain figuring everything out. Cusp writhed while he waited, but presently McAvity left without comment.

McAvity was gone three days on his next inspection trip and Cusp finished the first section and zeroed the integrators just as McAvity pulled into the air-lock.

Cusp was relieved when McAvity did not go immediately to the analyzer room. Maybe the fellow didn't know what was going on after all.

But Cusp was stunned when McAvity said one evening a month later:

"Whatever did you get for the answer on that problem you had set up on the analyzer that time?"

Cusp's lips tightened, then he pulled out a sheet of symbols and dropped it in front of McAvity. He waited for McAvity to start asking questions.

But McAvity studied the sheet for an hour, then he looked up. His blue eyes were guileless. "In the third line here, to the minus third should be to the minus fourth, shouldn't it?"

Cusp was astounded. He felt himself get red in the face, then he snatched the sheet and bent over it.

Presently, when his eyes began to focus, he looked at the equation.

He could have chewed his own tongue.

The man was right. A gyrocab pilot had called an error on Dr. William Cusp.

Cusp said frigidly, "I'll check it over."

BUT the implications of McAvity's remark, after Cusp had cooled off, were startling:

First, McAvity had a knowledge of science and mathematics beyond that of most scientists on Earth;

Second, he must know what those equations meant;

Third, he was working on the problem of instantaneous transmission himself!

Cusp caught him at it. He did not go to sleep one night when he was supposed to. Instead, he read for some hours in his room, then he wandered out to the main observation laboratory in the dome. As he had expected, McAvity wasn't there, but there was a light in the analyzer room. Cusp strode to the door.

"What in the world are you doing?" he demanded, as if he were talking to a child.

McAvity turned and regarded him levelly and said, "I'm working on the same problem you're on—instantaneous transmission."

Cusp drew a deep breath. So the man knew. Cusp was glad they weren't near the microwire recorder.

"Are you getting anywhere?" he asked facetiously.

"Maybe." McAvity frowned. "Instantaneous transmission will be a sort of space-warp, in the nature of a fifth dimension, I think. But I don't know yet how to produce it. Do you?"

Cusp gasped at the man's audacity. "Of course not," he said acidulously, and left.

This put a new light on the entire situation. McAvity was hunting the secret too. Then McAvity must know how valuable it could be. This made it a race of time, to see which one would find it first. And while every drop of blood in Cusp rebelled at the idea of entering into competition with an ordinary Peoples Party man, still he was practical enough to see that as long as McAvity should be alive and well, he would be dangerous.

So Cusp no longer tried to hide his goal. He spent long hours at the analyzer, and whenever he could, he left it set up so that McAvity couldn't use it. McAvity did not complain, but he himself used the machine whenever it was available, sometimes staying far past his regular hours of duty to finish a problem.

Cusp said once, caustically, "You aren't getting time and a half for overtime, are you?"

McAvity looked at him sharply. McAvity's eyes were a little red from loss of sleep. "My only pay," he said, "is in knowledge that you would not let me have back on Earth, and which you would not let me have now if you were not afraid to forbid it."

Cusp felt like calling him names, or something equally childish. Yes, of course he could forbid McAvity's using the analyzer, but he knew that McAvity would refuse the order, and Cusp did not want to bring things to a showdown.

He turned on his heel and left.

So they went along in a sort of armed truce for some two years. Cusp was not satisfied with his progress on the big problem; he seemed to be going in circles. He didn't think, from the thoughtful expression constantly on McAvity's face, that the big man was doing any better.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Germ of Hate*

ONE day he was in the library when McAvity sounded the alarm chime from the observation room.

Cusp ran out quickly. McAvity was putting on his oxysuit.

"There's something outside," McAvity said excitedly. "Something *alive!*"

Cusp resented the way he said "Something alive!" But he looked.

Through the transparent walls, at the side of the air-lock, sitting up on a small drift of frozen green cobalt vapor, was what looked like a miniature penguin. It was about six inches high, and it sat there quietly, apparently oblivious to the intense cold.

McAvity went eagerly into the air-lock and waited impatiently for the pressure to build up equal to that outside, while the bird-like creature sat on the drift and looked into the dome, with small violet eyes turning a little as Cusp walked closer to the wall.

What amazed Cusp was that it could sit in the temperature, which was twenty-three degrees Kelvin, and apparently be unaffected either by the cold or by the complete absence of oxygen in the lithium vapor atmosphere.

"If it can live out there," Cusp thought with a certain degree of satisfaction, "it certainly will die inside."

He watched McAvity walk up to it warily. The thing didn't move away. It looked at McAvity for a second with its violet eyes and then it hopped up on his shoulder. McAvity grinned. Then he went back into the air-lock. He looked anxious as he watched the pressure go down, but the bird didn't seem to notice. McAvity came inside and set it proudly on the glass work-bench.

"It's incredible," said Cusp. "It must have a wonderful internal pressure mechanism, to stand a hundred and fifty pounds to the square inch outside, and still not blow up when it gets in here."

McAvity nodded. "Yeah," he said. "It's still alive." His voice sounded as if he was relieved. "What do you suppose it is?"

The bird cocked its head and looked at McAvity and made a noise that sounded like "G-r-runk!"

McAvity's eyes lighted. "Well, then, it's Grunk you are," he said.

"It certainly did not originate on Stygia," said Cusp. "None of our surveys indicated any life whatever."

"It couldn't come from anywhere else, could it?" asked McAvity.

"It could," Cusp said sarcastically. "But where? And how?"

"If it isn't a native of Stygia," McAvity said, mixing some flaked milk in a saucer, "how can it stay alive out there for more than a minute?"

He held the saucer to the Grunk's bill, but it looked at him as if it were asking him to understand, and very slowly shook its head.

"Well, what do you eat, then?" McAvity was puzzled.

The Grunk didn't answer.

"Maybe nothing," said Cusp hopefully.

And nothing it was. Months went by. McAvity made a nest lined with soft fiberglass. The Grunk sat there when John was asleep and watched Cusp at the instrument-bench with its violet-colored eyes. When McAvity was awake, it sat straight and dignified six inches high on his shoulder, with its black and white feathers forming a perfect dinner-coat and the frill around its neck like the ruff of an ancient jester.

It never offered to sit on Cusp's shoulder, but one day while McAvity was sleeping; Cusp put the Grunk on his shoulder as an experiment. He didn't under any circumstances want it to feel that it had a right to perch there, but he just wondered how it would be.

He didn't find out, because it hopped down immediately and stood on the glass surface of the bench, gravely watching him. Cusp was so irritated that he almost accused McAvity later of bringing the Grunk from Earth. The obvious answer was that no native of Earth could have sat outside on Stygia without protection and still have lived.

CUSP watched it sit on the bench-top, and when McAvity awoke and came out, Cusp looked speculatively at the Grunk and said:

"I wonder what internal mechanism it has to counteract the gamma storms."

McAvity leaned forward. "Did it ever strike you," he asked, "that the Grunk is the answer to the problem of instantaneous transmission?"

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Cusp frowned. "How do you mean?"

"Well, look. The Grunk can sit outside there, where the pressure is two hundred pounds to the square inch, and it isn't bothered. Then it comes inside, where the pressure is thirteen pounds per square inch, and it doesn't even seem to feel the difference. The only way it could stand both those pressures is by instantaneous transmission of matter to equalize pressures."

The inherent truth of what McAvity was saying struck Cusp like a blinding flash. The man in his ignorance had stumbled on a logical explanation. Cusp bit his lip.

"It's the same when it comes from the lithium atmosphere to an oxygen atmosphere," McAvity went on. "It probably rearranges the elements in its own body into different positions, so it can utilize either element. And the same with the gamma rays."

"I believe there's some truth in that," Cusp said reluctantly.

"Another thing. All this probably started with instantaneous transmission of thought. That led to transmission of matter, and from there it's only a step to what is practically transmission of conditions. So if we could learn what the Grunk is thinking—if we could receive its thoughts, we'd be over the hardest part of the whole problem. Then we'd find that Man himself is the epitome of all scientific equipment and discovery."

Cusp's fingers began to rub against his palms. "Then," he said, "we'd better post-mortem the Grunk."

"No." McAvity was troubled. "No, you can't do that to the Grunk."

"But look, man. This creature is, as you yourself have said, the answer to the greatest problem of Man."

McAvity looked uncomfortable. "There must be another way. Maybe it will tell us some day."

Cusp snorted. "That creature can't tell you anything. It has this phenomenal ability, but obviously no real mental development to back it up. What it does, it does automatically. Now look. It's your discovery as well as mine"—it took a great deal of will power for Cusp to say that, but he had to put it over—"so we'll go in together on it. You will get equal credit for it back on Earth."

McAvity looked at him long and intently. For a while he seemed about to yield, but finally he shook his head stubbornly and said, "No, the Grunk is my friend. I couldn't agree to anything like that." He stared over Cusp's shoulder as if it embarrassed him to be so hard-headed. "Probably we would lose the secret altogether if we killed the Grunk."

Cusp snorted. He looked into McAvity's blue eyes and saw no weakening. He turned on his heel and left.

McAvity and the Grunk went back to the garage and McAvity began to dismantle the alternate engine. Cusp looked back there once, and the Grunk was sitting on McAvity's shoulder, watching McAvity's big hands on a wrench.

When they didn't appear at the next mealtime, Cusp went back. McAvity was sitting on a stool drinking hot chocolate. His face and arms were dirty, his hat was pushed back on his head, and he was talking to the Grunk.

"Well, Grunk, old kid, you and I and Susie'll be heading out in a couple of days. Looks like a nice gamma storm coming up, too."

He looked up as Cusp approached. This time there was no embarrassment in McAvity's eyes.

Cusp was uncomfortable. He had gone back there with the intention of being friendly toward them—or, rather, toward McAvity. But McAvity had the strangest way of putting him on the defensive.

DR. CUSP hesitated. For some reason McAvity stood up and moved closer to the caterpillar tractor. He leaned against the engine, and the Grunk hopped up on the running-board and sat there with its violet eyes wide and unblinking at Cusp.

Cusp went back without saying anything. The three of them were aligned against him. The three were close to each other, but they were holding him at arm's length. They were deliberately cold toward him, and they practically dared him to do something about it.

And when, two days later, the three rode out into the Stygian cold together, McAvity strapped into the sealed cab with that look of joy-in-combat on his face, Susie roaring as if she was eager to drive the cat across the frozen osmium earth for McAvity, and the Grunk sitting smug and intimate on McAvity's shoulder. Cusp made up his mind: He would post-mortem the Grunk.

Cusp had come to see that he had to do that. He had to be the one to find the an-

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swer, because instantaneous transmission was a more valuable secret than atomic power or the counteraction of gravity. Instantaneous transmission would make science itself clumsy and unwieldy. It would outmode all the cumbersome trappings of science and bring a revolution in commerce, communication—any human activity you could mention. It would completely decentralize government and industry.

But the most important item to Dr. Cusp was its probable effect on science; Cusp foresaw that a brand new technology would spring up in the place of science. It became vital, therefore, and urgent, that he, Cusp, get that secret and have entire control of it before someone like McAvity should get it.

Cusp wondered what McAvity would do when he should find the Grunk in a jar of formaldehyde. He wondered if McAvity's composure would break. Cusp would enjoy that. In fact, as he thought about it, he began to wonder if that wouldn't be one of the best results. McAvity was so unalterably, so confounded unalterably calm and self-contained.

Self-contained. That was it. McAvity was courteous enough. He spoke to Cusp, he talked over problems with him, but always impersonally, always with the Grunk sitting on his shoulder and its violet eyes fixed on Cusp. Cusp would enjoy hurting him.

In the next few weeks, Cusp considered various ways to post-mortem the Grunk, but there was an obstacle, and the obstacle was always the same: he was afraid that McAvity would lose his composure too far, would go primitive and do physical harm.

So, for a while, Cusp took no action. He ceased his experiments, for in spite of McAvity's insistence that it would do no good to post-mortem the Grunk, Cusp felt that the secret to the entire problem stood around literally at arm's reach—at arm's reach and yet unattainable because of McAvity. Cusp scorned McAvity, for the man was allowing sentiment to stand in the way of science. McAvity was definitely an atavism.

Cusp's distaste of Susie grew into dislike, and his feeling for the Grunk became active hatred. All of Cusp's tremendous energy began to boil and seeth and to verge on fulmination in a feverish desire to post-mortem the Grunk. The desire became an obsession.

One day McAvity had a request to make. He wanted Cusp to develop a new gasoline for the snow-cat.

"Stygia's weather trend is down," he said, "and at forty degrees Kelvin, the Tornado's fuel turns to slush unless it's under pressure. We've still got half a million gallons, but maybe there has been some change in molecular structure. Maybe you can figure something out for us."

"Of course," said Cusp.

## CHAPTER V

### *New Fuel*

AFTER some weeks of testing, he detected a minor change, perhaps due to incessant bombardment by gamma-ray energy, and so he went into their storehouse of seven hundred basic chemicals to find something that would, in a sense, "revive" the gasoline or at least prevent its freezing in use.

He worked it out eventually. Also, in the course of his work, he realized that the only way he could ever post-mortem the Grunk was to kill McAvity.

It shocked him at first, but before long he dismissed his sentimental inhibitions and looked at the problem logically, weighed McAvity's life against the value of instantaneous transmission, and saw that it was not only justifiable but his scientific duty.

It was McAvity who gave him the idea for a method. McAvity had pointed out at the beginning that of course the old fuel would not freeze in the tank as long as the pressure was maintained. The real necessity for non-freezable fuel was for the hundred or so twenty-liter plastic emergency containers—"jugs," McAvity called them—which he used as ballast for the long front end of the cat.

"I don't suppose I'll ever run out of gas," he said. "I never have. You learn to watch things like that. But something might happen sometime, and if it does, I'd like to have plenty of extra fuel—as long as we need weight on the cat, anyway."

It was in the transparent containers that McAvity had noticed the slush forming. The containers, unlike the tanks themselves, had no pressure in them.

Cusp discovered another reason why McAvity would have to be killed. McAvity's

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blue eyes, that at first had seemed guileless, began to be sharp, and once Cusp forgot his personal notebook and came out to find McAvity studying the symbols and equations written in it. Cusp took the notebook out of his hands and said coldly:

"We should have respect for each other's personal belongings."

McAvity reddened a little. "I didn't realize," he said slowly. Later that day he asked, "Don't you think everybody back on Earth should have equal rights to education?"

Cusp stalled. "Well, I don't know. It's a very satisfactory set-up as it is. The Science Party gets its members by heredity, and they furnish the science for the world. The Peoples Party is also determined by heredity, and its members actually run the affairs of the world. What's wrong with that?"

"I'm not sure," McAvity said slowly, "but I think we ought to understand each other better."

"I see no reason for that," Cusp said coldly.

"I do." McAvity's voice was mild. "Some day, when the problem of instantaneous transmission is solved, science will be pushed out of the picture by a new technology based on transmission, and when that time comes it will be better for the Science Party if those in power have some understanding of scientists."

"So," Cusp said bitterly, "you've been sent here by the Peoples Party to spy on me."

McAvity's face was taut. He looked at the Grunk. The Grunk was watching them both solemnly.

"Neither one of us came here under false pretenses. The Peoples Party knew why you were here, and you must have known why I was here."

The thing that enraged Cusp now was that he had been out-guessed. He'd never dreamed that the Peoples Party had a real conception of the situation. He hadn't really paid much attention when Lanschoten had warned him.

"We knew when they selected you," McAvity went on, "that the Science Party expected more from this twenty years than a meteorological report on Stygia."

Cusp's face felt drained of blood. Then his scorn of McAvity began to turn into a rising hatred.

"The sensible thing for us to do is to work together," McAvity went on. "Together we could do a lot for ourselves and for the peoples on Earth. Frankly, I don't know if the great masses of people on Earth are ready for such knowledge as this, but they can be made ready, and in the meantime the secret must be in hands that will govern it wisely for the good of all."

CUSP glared at McAvity. His hatred was beginning to turn to a cold rage. McAvity was telling him they ought to work for the good of everybody. McAvity was telling him, Dr. William Cusp, what to do.

"Education should not be an end in itself," McAvity went on, "but a tool. We must have a broader conception of things. You in your mentally rarefied atmosphere must learn the value of human feelings, because those feelings are the guiding power of humanity. Without them, education becomes a Frankenstein."

This was outrage. McAvity not only questioned the mental superiority of the Science Party, but he had the audacity to suggest equality between the two.

Cusp clenched his fists until the knuckles were white and he said doggedly, "I'll postmortem the Grunk. I'll find the answer, and we'll talk about who's going to control it later."

McAvity took a deep breath and he seemed to grow taller. "Nothing will happen to the Grunk. He's my friend. Besides, cutting him up wouldn't tell you anything."

"How do you know?"

"Common sense."

Cusp snorted and jerked his head back. "Common sense!"

"Sure," McAvity was unruffled. "Can't you see? Transmission is not a chemical change that you can put your finger on. It's electronic—cosmic, probably. The answer is in energy, controlled energy. Controlled by mind. Can't you see?"

Cusp felt on firmer ground now. McAvity was reduced to argument. The thing Cusp didn't like was that McAvity undeniably meant what he said—that he would not acquiesce in any accident to the Grunk. The man was just primitive enough to have a sentimental feeling for the Grunk.

Cusp looked squarely at the facts. He saw what he would have to do. He would have to kill McAvity first.

Then, so that McAvity wouldn't by some freak read his mind, Cusp said, "You're trying to upset the *status quo*."

"The treaty of Nineteen-Ninety-Nine,"

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Cusp said, and he talked fast because now the thought of killing McAvity was so strong in him that he was afraid McAvity would perceive it, "designated scientists of at least three generations of scientific work to be members of that party, because others were too erratic to be trusted with dangerous secrets."

McAvity faced him squarely. "Personally I do not believe your ten or fifteen generations of scientists and even your exceptional training, Dr. Cusp, have added very much integrity to the character transmitted by your genes. I think the way you react is determined by something a lot deeper—something that goes back into the primordial experience of thousands of generations."

Cusp snorted. "That's a popular theory—of your party."

"It's a sound one. And I'll tell you frankly, Dr. Cusp, if both of us were faced with an emergency, our respective reactions to it would be determined by factors not under our control—characteristics that were put there half a million years ago."

"That's heresy," Cusp said coldly.

"If it is heresy," McAvity said, "you'd better do what you can with it, because when I get back I'm going to make a lot of changes, and that is one of them."

McAvity's belligerence, of course, was the final pronunciation of his own death sentence.

McAvity had to be killed before the Grunk could be cut open. Also, it had to be done in such a way that the IBI would not even suspect murder.

The Grunk stood around on the glass bench and watched Cusp experiment with the fuel. Its eyes, like purple velvet, annoyed Cusp. Why did it watch him so closely when McAvity was asleep? It didn't pay any attention to him when McAvity was awake. Was it spying on him?

Sometimes, if Cusp hadn't had good control of himself he would have wrung its neck and had it over with. But he could afford to be patient and do the job right. A post-mortem would be difficult with McAvity alive.

McAVITY wanted extra gasoline to avoid being stranded on Stygia. He never had used any extra fuel. but—could he be caused to use it? And what then?

Certainly, if he could be stranded even a few hundred yards from one of the domes, he would freeze. Stygia's intense cold would penetrate the oxysuits in a few seconds if the heating units were not connected with power. A man would freeze to death even before he could suffocate.

So Cusp made a new fuel from the old—a very special fuel. McAvity made test runs with it and pronounced it the equal of the old fuel. He measured consumption carefully and found little difference.

So they filled a number of McAvity's "jugs" and screwed the covers on and set them outside. They didn't freeze in the coldest weather, and McAvity was pleased. He filled all the containers with the new fuel.

Of course McAvity did not know that Cusp had incorporated an element in the nature of solid carbon dioxide, that would decompose and build up considerable pressure in the containers—enough pressure to keep the fuel a liquid even in Stygia's coldest weather.

McAvity arranged the unbreakable jugs in their racks along the front end of the cat where he needed weight.

"I could build extra tanks there," he said, "but something can always go wrong with a tank. It springs a leak, or the gas line breaks from the vibration, and maybe the fuel gauge goes haywire."

"Why not make it out of plastic, so you can see into it?" Cusp asked.

McAvity shook his head. "Old-fashioned steel is still the best material—most durable. That new transparent steel gets too brittle when the thermometer drops down low."

That was like McAvity—always finding an excuse for using something completely outmoded. The man didn't have respect for modern science. He was an atavism.

Up there in front, the jugs were covered by a sheet-steel hood, but they were fully exposed to the cold and to the gammas. McAvity fastened them in and checked the lid on each one.

"Well, that makes two thousand extra liters," he said at last. "Susie uses around six hundred liters an hour, and when there's much digging to do, it takes two hours to get to Number Two. That means possibly twenty-five hundred liters for a round trip. The regular tanks hold three thousand."

He spoke with the apology of a man who had caused a lot of expense on something that might not have been necessary and he knew it, but who felt good over having a large margin of safety.

Cusp considered the entire business a

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juvenile precaution, and he was positively annoyed when McAvity hauled emergency supplies of the new gasoline to each of the five substations.

It was then Cusp set about arranging the circumstances to force McAvity to use the gasoline stored in the jugs.

Cusp had built the new gas on a butylene base. It had turned out to be one of the usual complex hydrocarbons, and now he set about devising a second fuel entirely different from the new fuel. He wanted something that would deliver plenty of power, but would burn a great deal faster—twice as fast to produce the same amount of power, he hoped—if the carburetors would handle it.

Also, it had to have considerably less specific gravity than the butylene compound, and also it had to be something that would not go into solution with the butylene. In other words, he wanted to be able to pour a pint of butylene gas and a pint of X gas into a bottle together, shake them up, and see the lighter gas promptly come back to the top.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Gamma Storm*

WHEN Cusp found the formula, he drew a deep breath of satisfaction. He felt a rush of excitement as he realized that both fuels were odorless and colorless.

On the shift before McAvity was to make his next trip to Station 2, Cusp prepared twelve hundred liters of butylene gas and eighteen hundred liters of the lighter fuel, and put them both in the dome tank together. He felt quite sure of himself as he saw the gauge register three thousand liters.

The Grunk had been watching with its soft purple eyes. It did not unnerve Cusp, but it annoyed him. Did the thing know what he had been doing? Cusp controlled himself. If it did, it couldn't tell anyway.

McAvity got up an hour later. The Grunk skittered off into the bedroom and presently came back on McAvity's shoulder, its round eyes looking steadily at Cusp.

McAvity ate one of his abominable breakfasts of six eggs and toast, with the sickening concoction that he called peach preserves. While he was eating, the Grunk left his shoulder and sat gravely on the other side of the table.

When McAvity had finished breakfast, he went into the garage where he kept the two snow-cats. Cusp went back to watch him checking.

"There are indications of an unusually violent storm," Cusp said. "Maybe you shouldn't try to make the trip today."

McAvity laid a big hand on the cat's steel tread. "Susie'll make it all right for us," he said confidently, and the Grunk hopped up onto the gasoline pump and waited.

McAvity filled the big tank on the cat. "Just three thousand liters," he noted. He checked the emergency jugs. He turned on the compressed air to start the big engine, and when it was roaring like the tornado it was named after, its thirty-two cylinders spitting blue-green fire, he idled it down.

He got into his oxysuit, sealed it with the pressure inside, turned on the oxygen, and climbed into the big cab, with the Grunk hopping after him. He sealed the cab and turned on the oxygen in the cab and started the pressurizer.

He let out the clutch and the cat crawled forward into the air-lock. Cusp closed the big doors behind him and raised the ones in front. He saw the heavy atmosphere sweep in against the cat like water pouring into the lock from a mile-deep flood, but the snow-cat lurched out and forward into the lithium-vapor atmosphere and the three-hundred-kilometer wind that drove frozen cobalt vapor like green snow in a blizzard far more violent than anything ever dreamed of on earth.

Cusp closed the outer doors and hurried exultantly back to his bench. He switched on the video screen but left the sound plug out. The video scanner on the other end was in the top of McAvity's cab where it would show the instruments to Cusp. McAvity's Vaulet showed the gamma storm as a purple glow, and the big man with the stocking-cap stuck on over his tight glass helmet switched in the anti-gamma coils for the entire cab.

The snow-cat rolled along at sixty kilometers, its million-candlepower headlights sweeping the snow-filled air for miles. Thirty-five kilometers out, a dark mass loomed up, and presently McAvity was against a mile-high drift of cobalt snow. He looked both ways. There was no indication of the end of the drift. He threw the cat into second gear forward and started the digging-screws.

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The cobalt usually wasn't packed too tightly, and the tungsten-carbide-tipped cutters would eat through pretty fast.

The face of William Cusp was thin and emotionless as he watched the video screen. He could follow McAvity's progress as if he were in the cab with him. He could see the great clouds of green snow funneled out by the blades of the digging-screws.

Cusp could talk to McAvity by flipping a switch for sound contact, but he seldom did that unless McAvity signaled for it, because the roar of the engine would fill the nylax dome—and Cusp detested it.

HE SAT erect in the dome and watched the screen, speculating on the probable maximum force of the cyclone. In the last thirty minutes, the planet had kicked the wind up to 525 kilometers, according to the automatic once-a-minute reports from the electronic anemometer at Station 5, the weather post. Already since McAvity had left, the headquarters dome was buried under a hundred feet of the cobalt snow, so now the dome did not even sway to the tremendous blasts.

It wasn't the velocity of the lithium wind or the intensity of stygia's near-absolute-zero temperature that was most to be feared, however. The worst thing on Stygia was the gamma storm.

Even before McAvity had left, the usually monotonous ticking of the Vaulet counter at Cusp's right elbow had become so fast it had turned to a shrill whistle, and soon after that had passed beyond the range of human hearing. Only the green indicator light of the Mansard decibel-check was left to tell Cusp that pure energy at the rate of something over a billion electron volts per square millimicron was every second bombarding the outside of the dome.

Cusp hoped it would not go much higher. He didn't know how much the anti-gamma system would stand. He rather thought it would take more, but no laboratory on Earth had been able to produce even a fraction of the terrific power of the fissured electrons flung free by the incandescent turbulence in Stygia's volcanic bowels.

An amber light at Cusp's elbow meant that McAvity wanted sound. Cusp closed the switch and cringed as the roar of the engine filled the dome. But the noise of the engine became a slow, steady throbbing as McAvity stopped the cat in the green tunnel and let the engine idle.

"How's the storm?" asked McAvity.

Cusp was startled. Was it uneasiness he detected in McAvity's voice? This was the worst storm in their ten years on Stygia, but McAvity had never asked an idle question like that before. Cusp did not know whether to be alarmed or gratified.

"Intense," he said. "I suppose you can see the green light."

McAvity nodded. His big face was sober. The ball on the top of his stocking-cap was loose, and it wobbled with his head. "I haven't had a good blast since we started through the drift here, but we're almost out now. We'll get the full force of it." He was looking straight into Cusp's eyes. "But never mind. Susie and the Grunk and I will make it all right."

He looked around at his shoulder. The Grunk nodded solemnly and McAvity grinned and patted its foot.

There was a flatness away from Cusp's eyes. He snapped off the sound switch. But the amber light flashed again. Cusp's face was even flatter as he opened the audio. "Yes?"

[*Turn page*]

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"You cut us off too soon," McAvity said mildly. I wanted to say we raised the beta-light on Number Two."

Cusp got control of himself. "Good. Now that you're out, I hope you get there. The transaudio is acting up."

McAvity grinned. "We'll fix it okay."

Cusp flinched. Always it was "we."

The Grunk put its bill against McAvity's cheek. Cusp pressed his lips together to keep from saying the wrong thing.

The thunder of the engine's thirty-two cylinders suddenly filled the dome and Cusp broke the audio connection again. McAvity made some movements with his arms out of Cusp's range of vision, and the snow-cat lurched forward, its digging-screws revolving at tremendous speed and the green snow spewing past both sides of McAvity's cab.

The cat broke out of the drift and jumped forward on the treads. McAvity cut the power from the digging-screws and shifted into eighth speed.

Then Cusp saw him duck.

THE cat stopped. Cusp turned on the sound again. He knew the engine had died. Even that engine would not operate in the full power of a gamma discharge. The blasts were fearsome things—in an odd way. They made no noise.

The only indication would be from a Vaulet counter—except that when they struck, everything else stopped. The heating equipment in McAvity's suit and in his cab ceased to work, the oxygen would not flow, the engine stopped. The only thing apparently unaffected was the Grunk.

It was weird, not being able to feel any force but still *realizing* its awful power. McAvity always ducked when it came. The thing that made it possible for him to leave the dome at all was that the full blasts never lasted more than a few seconds.

In thirty seconds McAvity raised his head and took a deep breath. He pressed the button to start the engine. Cusp heard the whine, then the engine fired, and Cusp broke the sound connection. Now the cat was getting only the normal force of the gamma rays, which didn't stop the gasoline engine.

McAvity had only a kilometer left of the forty, and he sent the snow-cat rolling at sixty kilometers again.

Presently he was inside the air-lock at No. 2, closing the doors behind the snow-cat. The Grunk was riding solemnly on his shoulder.

McAvity moved around on the No. 2 dome. An amber light flashed on the instrument-board in front of Cusp. He threw a switch. The anemometer at No. 2 showed the wind had jumped to eight hundred and fifteen kilometers an hour. The gamma bombardment at No. 2 was a little less than at the headquarters dome, and dropping rapidly. The temperature was within twelve degrees of zero Kelvin—the lowest they ever had recorded on Stygia.

Cusp began to tinker with the various instruments. Lights flashed and buzzers sounded in the headquarters dome as McAvity tested and Cusp watched.

McAvity finished his testing, sealed the cover of the transaudio, then prepared some hot chocolate and sipped it slowly.

"Tastes funny," he remarked to Cusp out of the video screen.

"We just opened the third warehouse," Cusp reminded him. "Maybe the years of absolute zero haven't helped it any."

McAvity made a tolerant face. "Shame we couldn't have enough atom-power to keep them all heated."

McAvity finished eating, and Cusp watched him checking the snow-cat. McAvity looked over the treads link by link, he raised the hood behind the cab and looked lovingly at the huge, glistening engine. He tried all the hundreds of wires, he took hold of each of the sixty-four spark-plugs and tried to shake it, then he started the engine and let it run while he watched and listened with his head cocked to one side, and the Grunk, on the opposite shoulder, cocked its head too, as if to listen.

The huge engine revolved slowly, with its eight massive banks of cylinders arranged in helical curves, its hundred and twenty-eight valves clicking rhythmically, the eight carburetors sucking noisily from the big tank of liquid oxygen amidships.

McAvity pulled down the hood and locked it carefully. He unscrewed the cover on the gasoline tank and used a stick he kept in the cab to measure the depth of the fuel. He read off, "Seventeen hundred liters" from the stick. McAvity was so old-fashioned he didn't even trust the electronic gauge.

He went to the front of the cat and lifted the steel cover, glanced over the rows of containers, examined the drive-shaft to the digging-screws, inspected the cutters. Then

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he lowered the cover, locked it, and patted it as he would pat a man on the shoulder.

"Susie's ready," he said, winking at the Grunk.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Engine Failure*

DURING the inspection Cusp had kept sound contact established. When the IBI should investigate McAvity's death ten years from now, they would undoubtedly ask for the complete files of microwire, so Cusp was alert to everything that McAvity might say. If the big man should show any sign of suspicion, Cusp would unshield the Vaulet counter long enough to scramble the record on the wire.

But McAvity seemed cheerful. He got again into the pressure-suit and got the oxygen adjusted and sealed the suit. Then he put on the stocking-cap and the great-coat and he looked almost as big as the snow-cat. He put one foot up and swung into the cab, then he turned around and bent far down, for the Grunk was trying to hop up to the cab-floor but couldn't quite make it. McAvity lifted it and set it on his shoulder. He strapped himself in. His face looked at Cusp out of the video screen and he said:

"Here we come."

The Tornado erupted into blue-green fire and a roar that filled the HQ dome. Cusp jabbed at the sound-switch but left the video on. The snow-cat lurched forward. The lock-door closed behind it. The outer door opened. McAvity and Susie and the Grunk rolled out into Stygia's worst weather.

Cusp looked at the gauges. The anemometer gauge showed nine hundred kilometers. He wondered how long it would be before even the hundred-and-forty-ton snow-cat would be swept away.

His perspective on the video changed from the ceiling of No. 2 dome to the ceiling of the snow-cat's cab when the cat rolled out into the Stygian night. McAvity shifted the cat into fourth speed forward and the cat followed the long beams of its searchlights into the driving lithium.

Cusp studied the gasoline gauges. They showed seventeen hundred liters left—the same as had been shown on the stick. The trip to No. 2 had been a little heavier than usual. Cusp felt a cold satisfaction settle over him.

The engine must be getting into the rapid-burning fuel by now.

In a few moments he saw that it was. He saw McAvity set up the throttle a notch. John looked puzzled. Presently he set it up another notch. Then he frowned. The Grunk looked puzzled too. Then the amber light asked for sound.

"What have you got on the wind?" asked McAvity.

"Right at nine hundred—here," Cusp said after a moment. "Blowing straight toward you."

"Maybe that's it," said McAvity. "I seem to be losing power for some reason." He idled the engine and Cusp could hear the distinct, rhythmic throbbing of the cylinders.

"It's hitting perfectly, but it's running slow," said McAvity. Cusp didn't bother to scramble the audio. The evidence—all the evidence—would be gone when the IBI should get there in 2327, because the lighter fuel would be gone.

McAvity would undoubtedly run the engine as long as there should be a drop of fuel of any kind.

McAvity looked a little anxious, but he set up the throttle several notches, and the engine roared once more. The cat rolled forward.

"You don't need to keep sound on," said McAvity. His voice was a little tight. "I know it bothers you. But don't go far away."

There was some satisfaction in having McAvity want him to stay close.

"I couldn't help much," he told McAvity. He tried to sound regretful. "The other engine is torn down, you know." Then he added for the benefit of the record. "The Vaulet shows a constant green light. Must be a steady gamma discharge beyond anything we know about."

McAvity's lips were pressed together. Only he and Cusp knew how deadly it would be to get stranded out there. As the batteries should get cold without power from the engine, they would produce less and less heat. The cab would be down to fifty degrees Kelvin in fifteen minutes. McAvity couldn't stay there and live. But he couldn't go outside either. He couldn't walk a hundred yards in that cold. The small heating unit in his oxysuit took its power from the snow-cat's batteries.

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NO, MR. McAVITY wouldn't even be able to step outside of the cab. He'd have to sit there and wait—wait for the cold.

Later, Cusp would take the atomic runabout, the first day when the gamma discharge was quiescent, and go after the body. But first he would open up the Grunk and see what made it tick—for the Grunk would undoubtedly come back to the headquarters dome as soon as it could.

Cusp then made what he considered a noble gesture. He left the sound switch connected. A dying man was entitled to have his last words recorded—provided he didn't say the wrong thing.

McAvity looked at the gauges. The gasoline showed fifteen hundred liters. McAvity frowned. "Two hundred liters gone already," he noted.

The snow-cat lurched forward again, and McAvity had to throttle her down. Presently she slowed. McAvity was puzzled. For the next ten minutes he worried the throttle, trying to keep the cat at an even speed. "Funny," he said. "It acts as if—"

Cusp knew what he was going to say—something about the gasoline. He disconnected the Vaulet shield for an instant and the static drowned McAvity's words.

Presently the engine settled down. McAvity was keeping the throttle wide open for just normal speed. He came to the big cobalt drift. The tunnel had filled up. He shifted into second speed. The cat advanced on the drift, its digging-screws whirling.

But its progress was slow. If McAvity pushed her too fast, the screws slowed down. Finally, he shifted back into minus third speed and let her crawl. She went steadily, but the streams of green snow pouring past the cab were thin and straggly.

When the cat finally broke through the drift, McAvity looked at the chronograph and sucked in his breath.

"An hour and ten minutes gone," he noted "and we're not quite half-way back." He looked at the gasoline gauges then and a deep crease came between his eyes. "Shows five hundred liters." His voice was incredulous. "That can't be right. What's got into Susie, anyway? That's just barely enough to make it back—maybe."

He looked at Cusp then, and Cusp was elated. For once McAvity didn't seem at all sure of himself. He looked quite helpless. Maybe he even distrusted Susie.

Cusp did some complacent calculating. From that spot it would take an hour and ten minutes to reach the HQ dome on normal fuel. That was seven hundred liters. But on the fast-burning gasoline that was left in the Tornado's tank, McAvity had less than twenty-five minutes of running-time. He would be approximately twenty-four kilometers from the dome when his tank would go dry.

McAvity watched the incredibly dropping gauges, and at twenty minutes, with one hundred liters left, he stopped the cat. He idled the engine, and at idling speed each of its thirty-two cylinders throbbed clearly and powerfully. He looked worried. He got the stick, twisted off the cover of the tank, and put the stick in, then pulled it up and looked. Cusp could see only a faint wet mark at the very bottom. McAvity screwed the cover back on and opened the center door of the cab. He ducked under the long hood, and a moment later he was back, carrying two of the emergency jugs in each big hand, and one under each arm. He set them on the floor of the big cab.

Cusp exulted. This was it. This was the pay-off.

McAvity was moving fast. He closed the door behind him. He took the small geared wrench tied onto the neck of one jug and turned the cover. His eyes opened wide when he heard the gas whistle out. Cusp knew what he was thinking. Two hundred and fifty below zero and the gasoline had vaporized. That wasn't right.

The Grunk was perched on the top of another jug. It watched with wide eyes as McAvity jerked the top off of the jug.

McAvity unscrewed the cover from the gas-tank, put the mouth of the jug in the opening and began to tip the jug from the bottom. He got it horizontal, but nothing flowed from it. He tilted higher, and then it was completely upside down but not a drop of gasoline had flowed out.

MCAVITY looked dumbfounded. He stared at the jug. He held it up. Even Cusp could see it from where he was. The jug was filled with long crystals of solid ice. Cusp took a deep breath of satisfaction. It had worked! To the IBI fifteen years from now it would look like an accident.

Cusp was very pleased. He looked expectantly at McAvity. The self-sufficient man who could do everything with his hands

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because he was atavistic, who had been able to make friends with Susie and with the Grunk—this man now was in a deadly spot. He'd lose the self-assurance that, Cusp realized fully now, had annoyed him from the beginning. He watched McAvity sharply to see the first sign of a break. He wondered if McAvity's face would fall, if his mouth would loosen, if his eyes would be shot with fear. McAvity looked at the other jugs. They were all right. He opened another one and held it up to pour. As before, nothing came out. McAvity set it down quickly. He nodded, his lips tightly pressed.

Cusp could not quite see it on the floor of the cab, but he knew it, too, was filled with frozen crystals.

McAvity sat down, then. He tried a third one. He looked at it first. It was liquid. He put it on the seat beside him and began to unscrew the cover, watching it, with his stocking-cap tilted at a queer angle.

The gas whistled out of the container. McAvity jerked off the lid and stared at it. He watched the liquid turn to crystals in the neck of the container and shoot down into the jug. He watched the entire twenty liters as they were transformed into white crystals before his eyes in seconds.

Then he looked up. His face had a different look on it now and it took Cusp's breath away. Cusp had never seen McAvity look as strong as he did at that moment. McAvity looked at the gauge, that now showed zero. He looked at Cusp through the screen, and his voice was burry. Cusp was astounded at the calmness in the big man's face, and he was transfixed by the intensity of power in McAvity's voice.

"You did this," said McAvity unexpectedly.

Cusp came out of his trance with a start. He had been so hypnotized by McAvity's unexpected reaction that he had forgotten to scramble the microwire. Now he would have to carry it on a little further. Perhaps this reaction of McAvity was the prelude to his breaking. When McAvity fully realized the spot he was in, he wouldn't be McAvity any longer. Suddenly he would crack, and then he would no longer be McAvity, the resourceful. He would be Mr. McAtavism—primitive, helpless, baffled by twelve degrees Kelvin. When the IBI should see him crack up on the microwire, it would discount anything McAvity might say.

"There must have been a mistake," Cusp said patiently, like an older man to a small, unreasonable boy.

McAvity continued to stare at him. His big hands balled into fists. Cusp reached for the Vaulet shield, but McAvity's intense gaze fixed on him. "Wait!" he commanded.

Cusp dropped his arm. He shuddered at the animal power in the man. It seemed to roll out through the screen and flood over Cusp like a physical wave.

"You crossed me," McAvity said abruptly. "You fixed the gasoline to happen this way."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Outguessed*

McAVITY sat back on the cab-seat. Cusp relaxed mentally. His arm darted for the shield. But now it was too late. He swore at himself. McAvity's unexpected courage had confused him.

The engine sputtered now in the screen. McAvity looked startled for an instant, as if, even though he had known it would happen, it was hard to realize. Then he relaxed in the seat and watched the engine die. The gas-pressure gauge went down to zero. The oil gauges for all thirty-two cylinders began to settle down. Almost immediately the engine-temperature gauge started down from its normal three hundred degrees Kelvin. The cold of Stygia wasted no time.

McAvity reached out and turned off the ignition. He left the heater on, and the video connection. He left the antigamma shield on.

The Grunk was on his shoulder. It seemed to huddle closer to him and put its beak near McAvity's ear.

McAvity sat slumped down for a moment, seeming to fight to control himself. Cusp waited confidently now for him to break. Suddenly he realized that that was what he wanted to happen, that was what he wanted to see more than anything. He didn't just want to kill McAvity; he wanted to break his poise, to take away his assurance. He wanted just once to see him beg.

McAvity looked up then. For an instant there was bitterness in his voice, and Cusp was exultant. Maybe McAvity would break that way—in vituperation.

Cusp waited for McAvity to castigate him. But McAvity's jaw was set tight. He looked

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full at Cusp. Different lights came in his eyes—hopelessness, then despair, then anger. The anger grew into rage but that lasted for only an instant. Then there was resignation, and finally calm.

McAvity spoke. His words were unexpected. "You've taught me something, Cusp. For that I thank you."

"What are you driving at?"

"I came out here four years ago because I wasn't sure of myself. In the People's Party we've always been taught that a man could not amount to anything without higher education. I see now that that was an idea fostered by your party. But part of your propaganda I never believed. I had a theory that when a man gets in a jam it's the things he has deep inside, the characteristics he's born with, that determine his conduct, his reactions. Those things are neither enhanced by education nor are they destroyed by it.

"That was my theory, and if it was true it would be highly important to the People's Party. But back on Earth there wasn't much chance to test it out. There wasn't any way, no unexplored land, no adventure. Everything was pretty well blue-printed, so we had no way to find out. But I figured twenty years on Stygia would give me a chance. Here would be the unknown and unexpected. Here it would be different—and it is, Cusp."

McAvity's voice wasn't loud, but the intensity in it, the indomitable vitality underlying it, the quiet self-assurance that still filled the man, caught Cusp and held him and stripped him of all his triumph. He glared at McAvity. He was disappointed. Here he was getting rid of McAvity and he should be exultant. But now, for the first time, he truly hated McAvity. He hated him more than he ever had.

Seeing McAvity die wouldn't be any fun. What he wanted was to see McAvity weaken.

"I have found the answer, Cusp," McAvity was saying. "I was right, of course. Education has very little to do with it. Education doesn't make a man of you."

If Cusp had been near enough then, he could have beaten McAvity over the head with a hammer. But they were far apart. Cusp showed control. He conquered the rage within him.

The Grunk still had its beak up to McAvity's ear—that is, up to the audio apparatus that transmitted sound through the oxysuit. McAvity seemed to be considerably puzzled. Cusp thought he had intended to say more, but now McAvity seemed to be *listening*.

He looked down at the Grunk. He seemed to be concentrating intently. Cusp could see the engine-temperature gauge dropping below twenty already.

THEN McAvity broke into a grin. He was staring at the Grunk, but now he reached up and patted its foot.

"Well," he said, "it's a small universe, isn't it?" He looked up at Cusp. "You know what? This fellow here has given me an idea."

"What fellow?" Cusp demanded.

"The Grunk."

Cusp sputtered.

"The Grunk," McAvity said, beaming now, "is from *Iota Orionis*, he says."

"Says?" Cusp barked.

"Well, no, not exactly. He just puts the thoughts in my mind." McAvity looked exuberantly at Cusp. "It's instantaneous transmission, Cusp, part of the thing we've been hunting!"

Cusp snarled at him. "Rot!"

McAvity was looking through him now. He went on dreamily. "The funny thing is, Cusp, I know how it's done. I think I could even do it myself, with practice. It isn't altogether something you figure out on paper, Cusp, or on the differential analyzer. It's also something that's done with feelings. I don't think you could ever do it, Cusp. You haven't the right kind of feelings. It takes warmth and sympathy and understanding—things like that. It's hard to put into words. I don't know that it *can* be put into words. But you figured for three years and you didn't get anywhere. Always going around in a circle. And this is why?"

For a minute Cusp wondered if this was to be McAvity's way of cracking up. Would he be delirious?

"The Grunk says," McAvity went on, "that when they heard Earth was sending an outpost to Stygia, the Iotans decided to send him out here to scout us, because Stygia is a lot like their planet as it used to be. But they wanted to find out about Earth people before they picked a place where they'd have such close neighbors."

"You're having a nightmare," Cusp said coldly.

"No, I'm not. He looked down at the Grunk and seemed to be listening for a moment. "Oh, yes, there's one other thing,

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Cusp. When you get back to Earth, you'll have to stand trial. And you'll be convicted. The Grunk knew what you were doing all the time. He knows about the third gasoline —the stuff of less specific gravity, that burned twice as fast."

"If he is so smart," Cusp said acidulously, "why didn't he tell you before?"

"He was shocked. He couldn't believe that a scientific man could be so primitive as to kill another man. He wanted to be sure."

"So he let you die," Cusp pointed out with a sneer. "What kind of friendship is that?"

McAvity was not disturbed. "The Grunk says if I leave the oxygen and the anti-gamma coils on, and open the doors suddenly, the cold will come in and freeze me solid before I can suffocate. But it won't kill me. It will put me in suspended animation for eternity, or until somebody thaws me out."

"The gamma intensity will make you as good as dead whenever you are thawed out." Cusp was hanging on. Whatever might happen, he wanted to be sure McAvity would go too.

But the Grunk's violet eyes looked at him from the video screen, and then it turned its head toward McAvity. McAvity seemed to listen, and then he looked up.

"The gamma rays won't affect me. The anti coils will stay until the batteries give out, and by that time I'll be solid. The gamma rays lose their deadliness on objects below a hundred degrees Kelvin."

CUSP felt suddenly chilled, as if a blast of the twelve-degree cold had touched him. "What does that have to do with me?" he asked helplessly.

"I'll tell you," said McAvity, and now the self-assurance in his voice exceeded anything Cusp had ever heard. "I'm going to quick-freeze myself. And what will you do? This record has gone in on the wire. You can't destroy it or lose it, because they can always find it with the detectors—until the uranium core disintegrates. Then what? Well, they'll say, 'Why didn't you go after him?' and you won't have an answer.

"I'm putting you on the spot, Cusp. You don't dare come after me and kill me, because of the microwire record. If you let me stay, that'll be all right. The Grunk is going to stick around and see that they find me. He's not in any hurry. And if it's of any interest to you, his report to the Iotans is going to be negative. He thinks Earth-people are a little too atavistic for them.

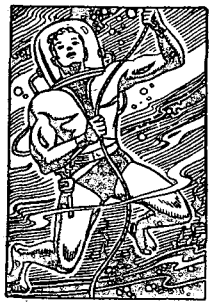
"It's a shame, Cusp. You and the Grunk and I could have gone places together. The way it is—well, I'm disappointed. I always thought that scientists were people set apart —people of wisdom and judgment and people without smallness in them."

He looked hard at Cusp. "I was wrong. They're just people like anybody else. Their heritage of education hasn't made them superior. It had only given them more opportunities. So when I get dug out, Cusp, I'm going to have the Treaty changed. The Peoples Party is going to have access to all knowledge. And I think it will be a better world."

Cusp looked at McAvity and bit his lip. He stiffened. McAvity would find out that Cusp could be strong too.

He saw McAvity flip the switch that turned off the heat. McAvity did not cut off the oxygen. He strapped himself in. Then he punched the button that opened the doors, and Cusp gasped. He was going to do it!

The nine-hundred kilometer wind roared in. The twelve-degree cold flooded the cab. McAvity said no more. He looked steadily at Cusp, and his face was calm and he seemed

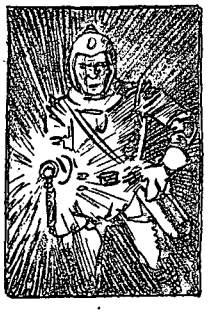
NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

Sea Kings of Mars

A Novel by LEIGH BRACKETT

White Catastrophe

A Novelet by ARTHUR J. BURKS

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to have no doubt of the eventual end.

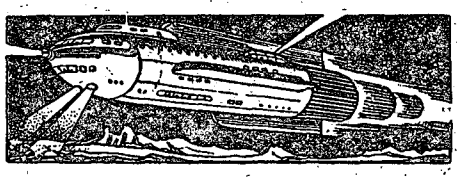
The irony of it was that he was right. There was nothing anybody could do to destroy or damage or lose those boxes of microwire. They were infusible, indestructible, unloseable. Sometime the IBI would find them, no matter what Cusp might do with them. And when they were opened back on Earth, they would tell.

McAvity tried to say something, but his lips were stiff already. There wasn't even a whisper. In three minutes more he was frozen solid. Cusp knew that from the fact that he didn't move while the green cobalt snow filled the cab.

The Grunk still sat on McAvity's shoulder, its bright violet eyes watching Cusp steadily from the video screen.

Cusp glanced at the Vaulet counter. He looked bitterly at the Grunk. He stood up. He walked across to the air-lock and opened the inner door. He stepped through into the lock. The door closed behind him. He stood for a second. He was without any protection from the wind, the cold, or the gamma rays. The gammas would burn him fatally in an infinitesimal flash of a second. He was also without oxygen. In the lithium vapor he would suffocate before he would freeze.

He threw the switch that operated the outer doors of the air-lock. He started to step outside, but Stygia's cyclonic lithium vapor wind roared in after him. It seized him, swirled him twice around the air-lock, then it ejected him with terrific centrifugal force. It threw him a thousand feet high, spun him in a great growing spiral and finally hurled him head-first at nine hundred kilometers an hour against the green cobalt mountain, and then into outer space.



## Wonder Oddities

WORLD'S largest brain, but by no means the best, is that of the elephant. It weighs around 5000 grams. Next largest is perhaps that of the whale at 2000, though there have been human brains that exceeded this figure by almost 200 grams. The human brain, which is supposed to be the best functioning one, averages about 1400.

OLD and new methods are oddly contrasted in the production of salt. 300,000 laborers working a 2,600 year old Chinese salt mine with methods almost as old as the mine, produce 250,000 tons annually. Less than 3,000 American salt miners, using the latest techniques and machinery, produce upward of 14,000,000 tons each year.

NEWEST in restaurant menus is a mechanized one set in the center of the table. It looks much like a juke box selector. One simply presses the button alongside the dish wanted, and the order is flashed on an electrical board in the kitchen.

DOCTOR Oscar E. Schotte of Amherst College believes it will soon be possible to regenerate amputated human limbs. Human tissue, explains this biologist, never gives up regeneration. If it did so no wound would ever heal. It only remains for physiologists, through research and experimentation, to learn more about natural regeneration—and how to assist nature.

EVERY night-flying bat uses a natural form of radar. As bats cruise around they emit shrill little cries, undetectable to the human ear. These sounds enable them to locate obstacles against which they might otherwise crash.

RAFTS used for life-saving can now be equipped with a midget searchlight about the size of a walnut that projects 1500 candle power over 60 nautical miles. Current is generated by a small hand-cranked generator.

*—Simpson M. Ritter.*

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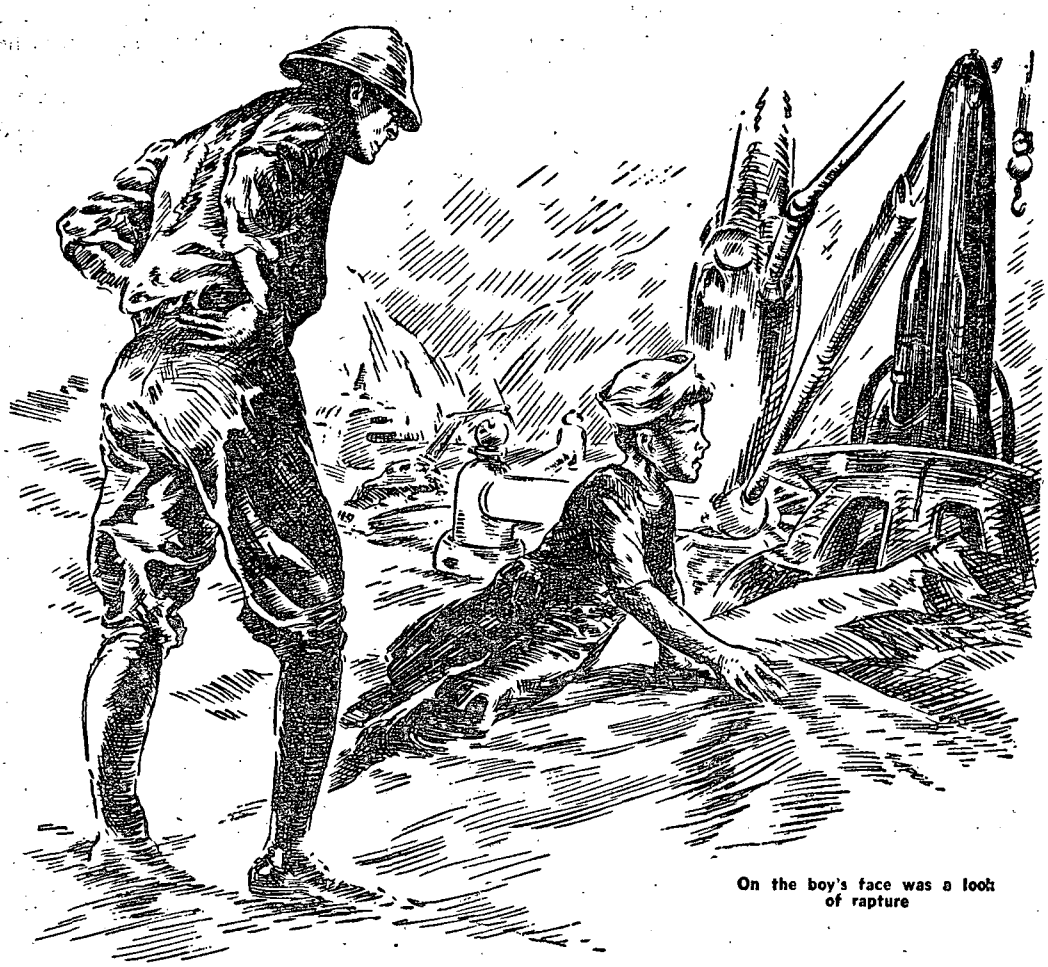

On the boy's face was a look of rapture

# Operation Pumice

By RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

*From the depths of space, Mel Robbins brings a note of hope to a world where only the young have dreams!*

HE GOT all the way through the guard lines and that must have taken some fancy figuring, or else it was just kid luck. It happened to be Mel Robbins who discovered him, early in the morning, when it was still cool, and not quite broad daylight. Robbins was one of the two inside men of Operation Pumice.

Mel had come out of the mess-trailer, and was having his digestion cigarette, when he spotted the youngster sprawled on his stomach on the New Mexico desert. Mel walked toward him without hurry, the way you might do when you see something so out of place that it leaves you incredulous. Ten paces away, Mel stopped, and studied his



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find for all of two minutes. The boy never moved, nor even seemed to know that anybody was so near.

He was spindly, fifteen or sixteen. Ten days ago he must have been very pale—maybe was the bookish kind—because now he was unbelievably sunburned. Shreds of dry skin stuck out from his blistered lips; his thin nose and high cheekbones were scabbed. The back of his neck, above his dirty T-shirt, was so crusted that it was like lizard hide. All this indicated vast and unaccustomed tribulation.

But on his face there was a look of ridiculous rapture, as if he saw the Millennium coming true; as if being here was worth a hundred times what it had cost, or fifty times what flesh could endure.

Mel Robbins had memories from his own early youth that led him to understand such feelings. His grin was sympathetic as he followed the line of the boy's vision-haunted gaze to the thing that loomed there in the dun-colored landscape.

It might have been taken for a vertical oil tank, a hundred feet high, capsule-shaped, silvery and seamless, and braced by slanting, winglike buttresses. But the dark vents arranged in a ring at its base suggested tumults of flaming energy. In its domed top were small, round windows. Above them, lettered in enamel that would not burn in the heat of atmospheric friction, was the melodramatic marking, MR-1.

MEL ROBBINS knew every part and mechanism in that twenty-million-dollar mass of coordinated equipment—even every brace, pared out for maximum strength with minimum weight. He knew the MR-1 by the mathematics of ballistics, physics, and chemistry, by the data from the unmanned probe-rockets that had gone far into space, by long experience flying the fastest planes in the world, by the many times he'd been whirled in a centrifuge, making tests, and by his years of dreaming that such a craft as this, was possible. He lacked only the final adventure of flight, and that he would have tomorrow, before noon.

Knowledge, building slowly, had dulled some of the glamor and washed out the mystery.

But now Robbins borrowed a thrill from the kid's eyes, or called it back from memory. For a second he saw MR-1 almost freshly—enigmatic, with hints of other worlds in it. Around it was the camp, the army tents, the portable liquid hydrogen and oxygen plants on their immense trailers, the barbed-wire barriers.

He chuckled, and the boy gave a start.

"Hi, fella," Mel said. "Didn't you meet any guys with rifles, while you were coming the last couple of miles?"

Scared to sullenness, the kid scrambled to his feet.

Asking the questions was a job for the security officer, but Robbins figured that Eagle Brow would make an enormity of the boy's intrusion. What was going on here had a military importance tangled with its broader scope. It was best to break the kid in gently for trouble. Besides, Mel Robbins was curious.

"Looks as though you had quite a journey," he said. "And people don't get fried by the sun, riding busses or trains. Where did you come from, and how?"

"Long Island City," the waif grumbled. He made a gesture with a grimy thumb. Hitch-hiking.

"Your folks know about it?" Mel asked.

"I sent postcards."

"What's your name?"

"Art Pelsudski."

"What's the trip for?" Mel figured that he knew the answer. He just wanted to hear the kid's way of saying it.

"I had to see Moon Rocket One."

The words fitted Mel Robbins' picture of how it had been, perfecly. When you were fifteen or sixteen, a dream could be a shining demon, a driving jet of intense interest. You had a couple of dollars, and the dope you could get out of books. No skill—and without it you were nothing. That was your poverty. You had only that wealth of glittering wonder. It was not worn thin by too much time spent close to the thing you wanted to do. When you thought of advancing science being perverted toward a final destruction, even that was glamorous; there was no stark shadow of worry, nor a recurrent idea that your efforts were better left unmade.

This Art Pelsudski—Robbins wondered how he had managed to remember such a name for even ten seconds—had run out on his family and school, had thumbed and blundered his way almost across the whole United States, just to see the first real space ship.

Robbins figured that, in his own day, he

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would have done it himself, if there had been an MR-1, then. In fact, for those times, he had done almost the equivalent. Too young for the second World War, he had hung around an airfield in Kansas. Starry-eyed and humble, he had badgered a fighter-pilot into giving him his mascot—a black doll made of large wooden beads, held together with cord. He still had the doll.

As he remembered, Robbins' thin, dark face softened even more. The kid saw, and seemed reassured.

"Say—you're Colonel Mel Robbins!" he burst out suddenly. "The man who's going up in MR-1 to try to circle the Moon! I've saved a lot of your pictures from the papers. Doctor Ernest Carnot must be here, too. Could I see him, maybe?"

"He's coming this way from the mess-trailer," Mel said. "All you have to do is look."

Young Pelsudski got one glimpse of the plain, middle-aged man with the bent nose. Then a pair of MPs spotted the kid, and took him by the arms. Mel saw the mask of fright and sullenness drop over that scabbed face again.

"How did he get inside the wire?" Carnot asked mildly.

"Search me," Mel answered. "With half a chance, he would have tried to stow away. Too bad he can't—with all that enthusiasm!"

Mel Robbins had too many practical preoccupations to spend any more time thinking about the youngster just then.

"Hansen's gang will be charging the cameras and checking instruments today," Carnot said. "While we give all the fuel pumps a final going-over."

SO CARNOT and Robbins climbed and crawled through pipe-like servicing tunnels aboard MR-1, which was not a single rocket, but five separate ones, sleeved into each other. The smallest, at the space ship's domed top, where the tiny passenger-compartment was, fitted into the second smallest, and so on, up to the largest rocket, which would provide the take-off thrust—the first step in building tremendous speed.

For Robbins and Carnot, their present work was routine, and completely familiar; yet with a subdued anticipation behind it. Tomorrow held the answers to many questions. Carnot, the ship's designer, whose life was too valuable to risk, might not find them out as well as Robbins; but there was chance of an accident happening so swiftly that Robbins would never know of anything happening at all.

They had lunch in the mess-trailer with a trim, dark-haired girl, the newspaper woman Robbins had married. She had been in Los Angeles for a day, conferring with radio people, and had just flown her private plane back to camp. Mel Robbins hardly listened to the business subjects she talked about, now, but he listened to her voice. He loved his Norma, and she loved him; but they were different in many ways, and sometimes they even lost the thread of each other's personalities.

"Terra Firma has enough wonder left in it for me, Mel," Norma used to say. "But you are the first man I ever knew who reached for the Moon and planets, and really thought he could have them. Maybe you can, at that. . ."

Now they had one more night together, and one more breakfast, in the house-trailer where they were living, in camp.

During the bustle and tension of early morning, Robbins saw the kid again. He was sitting under an awning, with a guard near him. The bandages now over his sunburn helped make him look ridiculous and dejected; but when Robbins grinned at him, and said. "What's the name? I forgot," he showed joy.

"Art Pelsudski," he answered. "Say—let me wish you luck, Colonel Robbins! Just think—in four days you'll be looking down on the other side of the Moon, that nobody's ever seen! An old theory may be right—that the Moon has been drawn out of shape by the constant pull of terrestrial gravity in one direction—it may bulge on the hemisphere which always faces Earth, and be hollowed on the other. All the air may be cupped there. There might be lakes and trees and strange cities in a tremendous valley. Nobody knows. . ."

"Nobody does," Robbins agreed.

The theory was ancient, weak, and too romantic and pat in the way that its supposed marvels hid behind the unknown. It was the look in the kid's eyes that interested Mel most. In it was the worship of great things of metal and power, and the driving love of unreached distance and mystery.

After that brief meeting, Pelsudski vanished from Robbins' thoughts once more. The fuelling of MR-1, the last preparations, and the thread of personal fear in him, held his attention.

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The flight was set for almost midday, when the Moon was nearly new, and to sunward. Solar gravity would help a little to draw the space ship along its course.

Once, at the last moment, when he was trying to think of something jaunty to say to his wife, Mel did remember the boy.

"Norm," he said, "you don't look much like the girls on the covers of science-fiction magazines. But a young friend of mine might be watching us. He's a purist. To him all science glitters. His heroes are big and strong, his heroines beautiful and soft. So let's make this kiss his way. He hitch-hiked out from Long Island City."

Robbins' words had turned out to be more serious than he had intended. Norma didn't seem to take them as a joke, either.

"Good enough, you bum," she said, her voice unsteady. "Maybe I'm juvenile, too. . . Well, so long, darlin', until eight or nine days go by. . ."

WAVING backhand, he climbed the ladder toward the entrance-port of MR-1. For a second he lived for Art Pelsudski, or maybe more for his enthralled, earthbound self of fifteen years ago. Or was that the same? The news people who were present, didn't matter. Perhaps he should be wearing his light-weight vacuum-armor over his slacks and sweat-shirt for more drama—okay, call it corn. But this trip, in the sealed passenger compartment, he wouldn't be needing the armor.

The fierce desert sunshine was cut off when he climbed through the port. It was cold, here. For a moment, now, with his nerves wearied from tensions, and dulled to enthusiasms, he hated the great, rimed tanks of liquid hydrogen and oxygen that he was climbing past in the semi-darkness. He was thinking:

"If politicians didn't put so many restrictions on reasearch, we wouldn't be doing this with chemical fuels. We'd already have an atomic motor, simpler and safer. . ."

Mel knew that in part he was just grumbling, against that other—that recurrent—fear. Now a guided missile could not only come from the other side of the Earth; it could be launched from deep in space. That idea grated against other hopes. But a scientist did not quit working, any more than he willed his pulses to stop.

Mel Robbins found Carnot in the domed and padded passenger compartment. The thick quartz glass of the windows was leaded and darkened against the cosmic rays and ultra-violet of the void. The older man grinned mildly in the dim light.

"My last look-around," he said. Probably he didn't like being left behind, and maybe there was some of the same mood that Robbins had. "We're selling the eternal enigma, I suppose—first. Then, whatever comes out. Oh—you'll make this trip all right, Mel."

Mel heard the receding click of Carnot's feet on the ladder as he sealed himself inside the compartment, dogging down the airtight hatch. Then he took the small microphone-speaker unit that was corded to the wall.

"This is Robbins," he said into the mike. "I'm strapping myself to the floor-padding, now. Prone, a man can stand about nine gravities of acceleration. It won't be that bad. Now all I do is wait. You don't trust the firing and direction of a space ship to a pilot. Clocks time everything."

His words were being rebroadcast by a hundred stations. He didn't mention that he felt as if he was near an atom bomb, about to explode.

"Hear that rising hum?" he said. "The main stabilizing gyroscope is starting. That slobbering noise is the rotary fuel-pump of the largest rocket, going into action."

Then came the roar of hidden flame, and creaks and crackles in the structure of MR-1, loaded with hundreds of tons of ticklish fuel. Such sounds described themselves. He didn't have to.

"I can feel a little wobble," he said, close to the mike. "That means the ship is fire-borne—off the ground. The thrust feels gentle, at first. . ."

The sense of weight grew with awful steadiness, pushed his jowls toward his ears, made his heart labor, and the flesh of his cheeks feel tight.

He spoke at broken intervals: ". . .end of first minute. . .Fifteen miles altitude. . . Acceleration is about half a mile per second, every minute—not too hard to take. We'll use a little over seven miles per second, maximum velocity. That means a total firing time, for all the rockets, of only fifteen minutes. Then MR-1 just coasts on. Speed can't hurt anyone—only too fast a change in speed. The Earth goes around the sun at eighteen miles a second, and we can't even feel the motion. . ."

He talked on, mixing the announcement of events with bits of lecturing, like he was

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supposed to do:

". . .vision dims under high acceleration, but I can still see that there's more light in the compartment, now. The ship has climbed out of the atmosphere. There's no air to cut down the sun's brightness. . . Hear that clatter? Largest rocket, empty, released to fall. Watch your heads! The sounds of the smaller rockets, vibrating through the ship, will be shriller. . ."

Once he said: "Are you listening, Norma? Hi, Carnot!" Then he joshed a little: "Say—this is kind of dull: Everything happens just as we expected. . ."

THE ROCKETS burned themselves out in succession, and dropped away, and Mel announced the end of each.

"So!" he said at last. "The tubes of the smallest rocket, in which I'm riding, have cut themselves off, though there is still dry-powder fuel in reserve. The sudden silence hits you. All you can hear is the hum of automatic cameras, and cosmic ray instruments, and the click of hot metal contracting. Space, outside, is pretty cold. . . But there's a scorched smell, here. The sudden lack of thrust makes your stomach feel funny. . . I'm already quite a way from Earth. This initial speed can gobble up even astronomical distance in a hurry."

Mel Robbins was silent for a minute. Then he spoke again:

"I've removed a section of floor-padding that covers a window. There are no rockets below to block the view, now. The Earth is a greyish-green mound, with nothing clear in it. The white areas must be clouds, though they don't look like clouds. I can see the atmosphere as a sort of bluish fringe. Beyond it the sky is black, the stars sharp as needles. It's a beautiful view. . ."

Robbins didn't express his private thoughts—that looking back at Earth from space was a symbolic moment to him, once dreamed up, and then built for. Well, he *was* happy about it. "Fella," he thought silently, addressing his past self, "you waited a long time." So Robbins was looking back in another sense, too.

He was aware that his meeting with a boy named Pelsudski had something to do with the way his mind was rambling, just as did the knowledge that progress was trying to find its way through a period in history when growth could be real, or could mean The End.

Vagaries went through his head, stray thoughts to be chuckled at, or taken half-seriously. If he had been able to look at the Earth from space, long ago, it would have been sheer glory. Now it was something less. Some of the charm rubbed off just by your becoming a man. Was that justice to a young visionary? His perfect height was never quite reached, even in realization.

Mel even felt a bit sheepish over his success. In a way he'd been two people, and wasn't this moment more the creation of his boyhood? If he had always been the plodder he was now, he wouldn't be out here. But the boy changed, and so was cheated. Why couldn't success come when the appreciation of it could be highest? The timing was wrong, somewhere.

Robbins shrugged, and returned his attention to the mike.

"Gravity is dropping off fast, with increasing distance from the Earth," he said. "I feel light—it's like falling. I think I'm going to be slightly ill. . ."

By snapping a small switch on the microphone-speaker unit in his hand, Robbins could have let Norma or Carnot talk to him. But he didn't want either their too serious, or perhaps playful, sympathy. In avoiding it, he showed a certain playfulness, himself.

Prone once more, he just kept on talking, about anything that came to mind, repeating what had been in the papers, and on the radio:

". . .MR-1 should go up, Moonward, at slowing speed against Earth-gravity, for nine-tenths of the two hundred forty thousand miles distance; then it will be in the sphere of the lunar pull. It is aimed not to hit the Moon, but to swing naturally in a half-orbit around it, like a rock on a string of gravitation, or like a comet looping around it, like a rock on a string of gravitation, or like a comet looping around the sun. After that, it will start tumbling back toward Earth. . ."

Mel talked on until the space sickness really got him. He had strapped himself down, again; but he felt as if he had lost his stomach. He never remembered just when it was that he shut off the mike. In his misery, he managed at last to sleep fitfully, and for once he had nightmares. He hurtled and fell. Or he struggled across sun-blasted deserts, thumbing to leering motorists who never stopped.

At intervals of wakefulness he radioed:

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"All okay." After some hours it became true. Space sickness could pass, like sea sickness.

The first words he got from Norma were, "What are you doin', Mel?" with a warm laugh.

In their apartment in L. A., she used to call to him from the kitchen with that same phrase. He knew that now she meant to remind him of the memory.

HER VOICE was coming up to him on an aimed radio-beam, and nobody else could hear it. But the beam stabbing down from MR-1 wasn't so narrow; besides, everything he said was for broadcast. Well, why should he care about the lack of privacy? Things had gone very well. The worst dangers were over. He felt relaxed and gay.

"I'm doing the tricks from the imaginative fiction about space, hon," he chuckled, when he had switched to transmission. "Shaking water out of a bottle—it does form into chains of globes that drift through the air with almost no weight at all. I can float up to the ceiling without any trouble. . . I love you, honey. . .Wish you liked to see things like the sun with its corona visible. . ."

Norma laughed again. Her voice turned very gentle. "Happy, Mel?" she asked. "You've got what you want?" There was fondness in her tone, mothering, and mild feminine cynicism, mixed with satisfaction. Part of her seemed forever out of his reach. But he felt fond, too.

"Sure," he said.

Time passed. Robbins talked on the radio—to everybody, to Norma, to Carnot. He slept. He ate chocolate and food concentrates. He inspected the air-purifiers, and the cameras and instruments, which could be reached by unlatching sections of padding from the walls and floor.

The Moon grew to a pock-marked crescent, hideous with nearness. The turnabout came at last. Lazily MR-1's heavier base rolled around till it faced the smaller world. It was in the gentle grip of lunar gravitation. For a while it swung like a slow pendulum.

Mel talked to his microphone:

"I can now see part of the hemisphere that is always hidden from view on Earth. So far it shows the same kind of craters as the visible hemisphere, and the same kind of *mares*—'seas.' Though they aren't seas, but airless deserts of lava, sprinkled, it is supposed, with volcanic pumice. The same kind of stuff that people used to scour kettles with. . ."

Robbins spieled into the mike until the vast bulk of the satellite began to eclipse the Earth. MR-1 was curving behind Luna, now. Radio communication would be eclipsed, too.

He changed to reception.

"Can you hear me, Mel?" Norma's voice was already thready, and full of weird echoes. Her tone was a little taut.

He moved the switch again, and said, "Yes, still. . . So long for a couple of hours, Norm. . ."

Reception gave only a thin crackle after that. Robbins was alone, as nobody had ever been before—a quarter of a million miles from all of his kind.

Jagged crater walls were very near—only a couple of thousand miles distant—and in full light of the sun. Mel peered at them from the floor window. MR-1 still kept its heavier base Moonward, though now there seemed no sense of weight at all—the centrifugal force of the ship's curving path counterbalanced gravitation.

Some of the craters were like Tycho, on the familiar hemisphere—white, with streaks of white, powdered rock radiating in starred pattern around them. Maybe these craters, were not volcanoes, but the bruises of gigantic meteors, made when the Moon was already old, in a crust that had cooled to rigidity.

The cameras and instruments were mainly automatic; still, for a while, Robbins was very busy, making sure that everything functioned as it should. But his mind worked separately. He was at his goal, the farthest point of his journey, meeting the unknown. He had completed a step in science, proven a radically new human power. There was a thrill in the accomplishment—a subdued, icy one. Everything in his life seemed to focus itself toward this time. In this solitude he could not have kept his thoughts from rambling. Perhaps no one could.

He pictured what the Moon must have been like, a billion and a half years ago, with hot, volcanic gases trailing off into space. Lunar gravity had never been strong enough to retain an extensive atmosphere.

Mechanisms whirred. Radar beams were probing down, reflecting a record, perhaps, of mineral deposits—radioactive elements were hoped for. Maybe the Moon had them; maybe not.

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LONG ago Robbins had imagined lunar colonization—men in strange armor building airtight shelters, observatories where telescopes would never be murked by an atmosphere, ramps from which space ships could leap toward distant planets, with an attraction of only one-sixth that of Earth to retard them.

He knew his eyes must have glowed with that vision, then. Now it was not as wonderful as it had been, though much of it could still turn out the same. It would be parallel to other advancement—in medicine, in living, and, one still hoped, in social science. You couldn't stop the tide—you wouldn't want to—but if war came in this era of untired power, a whole planet might be torn to pieces.

Mel Robbins could see most of the mysterious hemisphere now, and his attention was drawn inevitably back to a minor memory. In the sunshine the lunar scene was as stark as dry bone.

"There's no valley with air and trees and cities in it, Art Pelsudski," he said aloud.

Somehow this fact hit Robbins—dropped his spirits a notch further. It seemed like a defeat for the kid, for himself of years ago, and for all the naive souls who dreamed idealistically.

He knew that the quiet of humming mechanisms, and of space, and of absolute solitude, with the skeletal Moonscape so near, had depressed him. But he knew, too, that his pessimism was no deeper in quality now than it had been for a long time, in the back of his mind. It was reasonable; you couldn't wish away the facts that built it. It had an overpoweringly real basis. How could you ever fight the mistrust of millions of people for millions of other people of another nation? The answer was simply "Sooner or later." Robbins' sniff and shrug and one-sided smile, had the humor of fatalism in them.

For a minute, because this thinking seemed to have reached a conclusion, he considered other things. There were four days of his journey yet to pass. He'd probably make it all right, now. Soon he'd be talking again, by radio, with Norma, from the other flank of the Moon. Then the long fall Earthward, speed mounting. Near the Earth, dry-powder fuels, blasting from the jets, would check MR-1's velocity a little. Two hundred miles above the Atlantic an immense metal-fabric parachute would open in the thinnest fringes of the atmosphere, checking it more. MR-1 was light enough to float. He'd be back with Norma, Carnot, and their friends. History, for what it was still worth, would call him the "Columbus of Space."

It was a nice, melodramatic title. It made him chuckle. The final effort to gain it had been easy. He'd simply ridden an automatic machine. If there had ever been any hero in him, it was long ago, when nobody knew him. Dream and fulfillment were mistimed, like a lot of things in the world.

Again his ruminations followed an inevitable route. He remembered a kid, burnt by the sun, in dirty clothes, sprawled in the desert, with a ridiculous look of rapture on his face. Scared and inexperienced, he'd begged rides across three thousand miles. That was guts to admire. Grabbed by the cops, he still found appreciation in being near MR-1. He didn't realize the future that hung over him.

Maybe it was protective instinct for the young; maybe it was maudlin sentimentality connected with being out here beyond the Moon, maybe it was just pity—Robbins didn't care, then. That kid was somehow important to him, seeming to make him feel that way by just being what he was. Robbins knew that he had to do something for this Art Pelsudski—build him up, blind him a little to what was coming, let him feel that the universe was still okay.

It wouldn't be hard to do. Mel looked down at a lunar "sea"—a huge patch of desolation. *"Mare Pelsudski?"* No, that was too much to give, and too academic.

BUT another idea came easily. From a camera he removed a print—the first picture of the mysterious hemisphere. With a pen that didn't feed too well out here, he began to write across it. . .

The surprising thing for Robbins then was that right away he began to feel better. There was a warmth in him now for the kid, and for what he was doing for the kid. It occurred to him that Pelsudski, being young, was a symbol of the future—a rather splendid one. The idea was enough to turn Robbins' mind around, making it argue in another direction.

The word "feelings" became a kind of pivot for his arguments. What you could do about the future was related to what you felt about it. Feelings were the critical factor in this age of danger and triumphs, when the

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weakness was the human element. Some feelings were constructive; others were bitter and deadly. All of them could spread from one person to another—across a country, or even many countries—just as something good had spread to him from Pelsudski.

There had been, and certainly still were, many spreaders of feelings—self-interested dictators, honest statesmen, moralists. The good-intentioned ones had been trying to sell fairness, freedom from prejudice, equality and optimism for a long time, while they attempted to steer the world through trouble. Plenty of them had made fools of themselves; but they had at least tried. Others had turned insincere. You might feel cynical about the whole repetitious business sometimes. But the important fact was that no final calamity had yet come; so maybe the good men had helped, and would go on helping until a solution was found.

Mel Robbins' hopes lifted. He might help, too. Suddenly his eyes twinkled. He was the guy who had crossed space, wasn't he? He was now the natural reigning hero, for all kids, everywhere.

Maybe he could make his voice reach even into the darker lands. In the world there must be millions of idealistic youngsters like Pelsudski, with the same and other interests. They were the core of the future. What the youngsters as a whole, everywhere, came to feel about the future, ought to be the truth about it. Help them along, when they deserved it. Let them know that their universe was all right.

Robbins read what he had written across the photograph of the spaceward side of the Moon:

*"To Art Pelsudski: When you are the first to land an atomic ship on—say—Ganymede, largest satellite of the planet Jupiter, remember me, and keep thinking straight and fair. Regards from Mel Robbins. Written in space while rounding the Moon in MR-1: 1959."*

Robbins grinned. His prediction could even be true. Pelsudski had the guts and the fury. Robbins felt fine. At least he had a philosophy and a beginning. The shadows in the years to come had receded a little. Pelsudski had given him something. Now he would give something back.

He knew that getting the picture with that message on it would change a troubled Earth to humble heaven for the boy.

*Matt Carse Battles for Survival in the Mars of a Million Years Ago When He Discovers the Dream-World of an Archaeologist and Finds that the Dream is a Threatening Reality in—*

## SEA KINGS OF MARS

*An Amazing Complete Novel*

By LEIGH BRACKETT

FEATURED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE — WATCH FOR IT!

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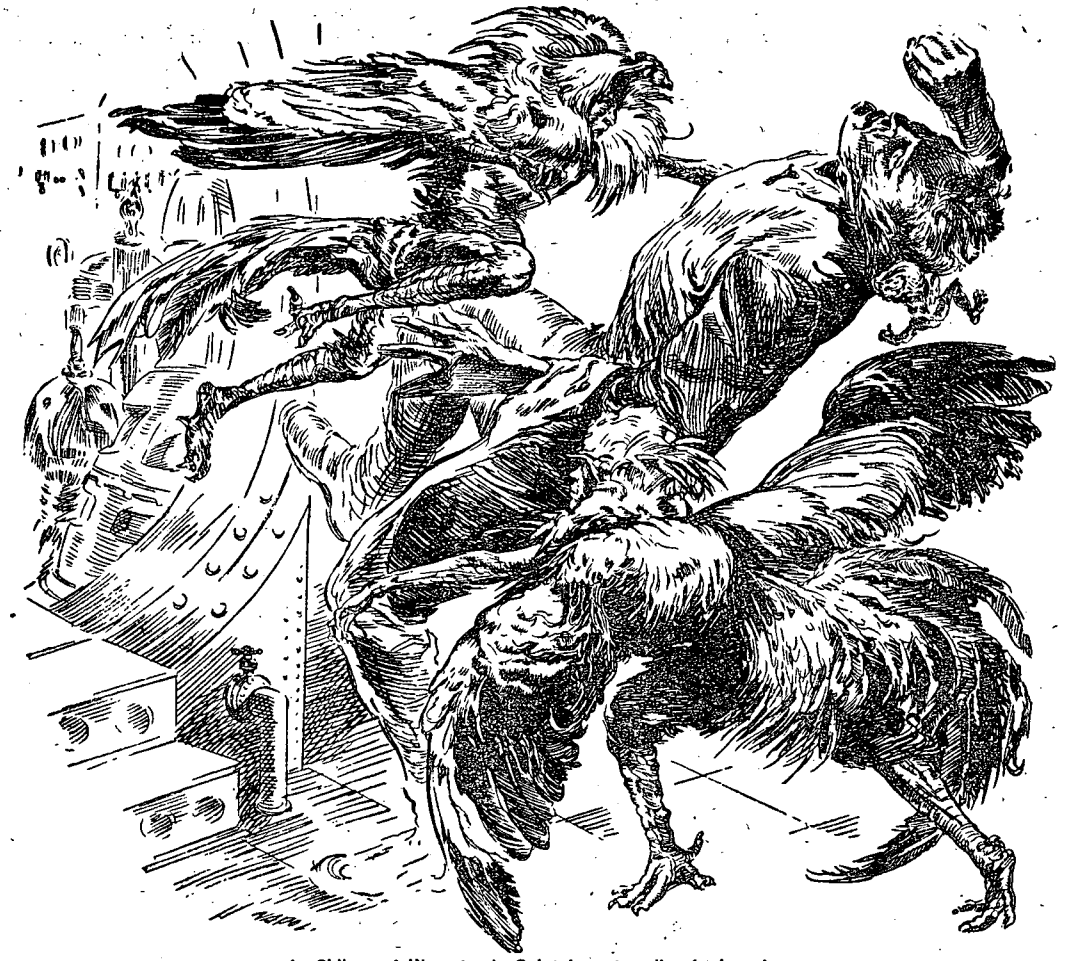

As Chika and Hjan struck, Quintal went reeling backward

# Quest of the Starhope

***They were helpless, these human-like captives from other planets, and Quintal, the ruthless hunter, was strong. . . .***

BERT QUINTAL was not particularly surprised when he saw the city. There were a number of them in those vast wastes of northern Mars, drowned in the desert sand, lifeless and forgotten for ages.

He was not even particularly interested. Far to the south, on the edge of the polar barrens, his assistant Larkin was going through the routine motions of digging and classifying in just such a place, to give the Quintal expedition the semblance of a respectable scientific investigation. Quintal was fed up with drowned cities.

**By LEIGH BRACKETT**



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Sheer boredom had driven him out in the little one-man scout *Starhope,* to prowl the dreary wastes in the faint hope of finding something worth taking. Quintal was concerned with life, not death. Life that could be trapped, shipped back to Earth, and exhibited for profit, a procedure that had brought him most of his popular fame and money.

He had found nothing. Looking down at the utter desolation of the landscape, he hated it with a bitter hatred. And then, quite suddenly, Bert Quintal was face to face with the only terror he had ever felt.

It was not really sudden, that terror. It had grown slowly out of the long dull days, and now it stood before him where he had to look

He had stripped Venus and Mars of all they had. Jupiter was denied him, barred off by the gulf of deep space that no rocket ship could cross. There was no more place to go, nothing to do.

He had never had a friend, nor anyone to love. Nothing but the driving restlessness that sent him from the Chicago slums into the rusty tramp ships as a boy of thirteen, that had made him claw and trample his way to the top, hungry for glory and money, and yet dissatisfied with them, because no matter how much he got there was always something new beyond.

Now there was nothing.

In a kind of desperation, he looked at the dead city below the ship and said, "Well, Butch? Do you see anything?"

He did not speak aloud. There was no need to speak aloud to Butch.

Butch answered, also silently, "Those low hills to the west—there is some life there. I think it is the only animal."

Butch was very small, less than the size of Quintal's hand. He clung with his four sucker paws to the back of the Earthman's neck, so that their thoughts should meet easily. Butch came from Venus. He had a wife, and the two were the last of their race.

EVOLUTION had given them bodies that had no worries about food and water. Their transparent fur took from air and sun, and root-like fibres concealed in pouches on their undersides could strike down into the soil to draw nourishment from the earth. They were mostly mind—mind of a power and sensitivity beyond Quintal's understanding.

He had snatched them up for exhibition on Earth. And then he realized that Butch could give him more another way.

He left the female where she was, knowing with cynical shrewdness that Butch would give his soul to get back to her. In seven years Butch had saved Quintal's life a score of times and brought him more wealth and more fame than Quintal alone could have won in ten lifetimes.

Now, apparently, even Butch could not help him.

"Animal life," he repeated. "Nothing much in that."

"No," said Butch. "You might as well go back to Larkin." The little body stirred against the Earthman's flesh.

"Take me home, Quintal! You haven't any more need of me. Please—take me home!"

The man swore, in sudden fury. His hand rose, to slam down on the firing keys.

Then he saw the flicker of movement among the towers of the city below.

"Living things!" he shouted. And then, ominously, "You saw them, Butch. You always see. Why did you lie?"

Butch hesitated, and Quintal laughed, shaken out of his black mood by the unheard-of surprise of life in a drowned city.

"Sentimental fool!" he said. "Watch out, shrimp, or you'll never see Venus and that animated powder-puff again."

His body was tense now with excitement. He took the *Starhope* down, and watched his rocket flares score the white top of the great building where he landed.

The city stood in a sea of sand that rolled in desolate ochre waves under the whip of a thin, sad wind. It was submerged in sand, the dry spray chafing at the towers that were all that showed above the restless breakers.

"Life, here!" whispered Quintal, still not believing it. He grabbed for his warm coverall.

Outside in the cold wind, with Butch hidden as usual under the coverall's hood—Butch saw without eyes and heard without ears—Quintal waited. The mental voice of Butch was sad with his knowledge of what was going to happen.

"The first ones," he sighed. "There, coming around the octagonal tower."

There weren't many of them. Perhaps two hundred. They came on wide shimmering wings, fantastic little creatures with furry human bodies no more than four feet high.

They wore kilts of some woven stuff, and they bore tiny pencil tubes in their belts.

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They landed like puffs of thistledown, in a wide circle on the roof, as strange and lost and pathetically beautiful as their dead city.

"Well," rasped Quintal's mind. "What about them?"

Butch let their combined mental trend wash through him.

"They're friendly, so far. I get a peculiar mass impact: 'We are the old race. We are without fear'."

The red northern half-light held them in an unreal glow. They were still, watching Quintal with great luminous eyes, and the Earthman's mind throbbed with calculating greed.

Two of the fairy creatures stepped forward. Male and female, the soft pale fur shining on their perfect bodies. The thought of them crammed into the dark hull of the big expeditionary ship, and then caged and chained for the edification of gaping mobs, gave Quintal no pain whatsoever.

"Well, Butch?"

The tiny body stirred on his neck. "The chief, Chika, and his mate Hjan. Please, Quintal, don't steal these people. Environment has forced them into barbarism, but they were great once. They're all that's left of the anicent People of the Sky."

THE People of the Sky! Legendary creatures out of Mars' lost youth! Quintal could scarcely restrain his excitement. What a find!

The winged man spoke. "Who are you, stranger from the heavens?"

He used a pure archaic form of the bastard Martian spoken in the starveling canal cities.

Quintal answered, "I am a great chief. I greet you, Chika. Also Hjan, your mate." He didn't have to stumble over the semi-aspirate. Butch gave him the exact pronunciation.

The little people started. "How did you know our names?"

"I am a very great chief," said Quintal. "I know all things."

It was a trick that, thanks to Butch, he used often in dealing with the semi-human beings of lost colonies. In rapid succession Butch read the names of the others, called to the mental forefront by this exchange, and Quintal repeated them solemnly.

Chika bowed with quiet dignity. "You are welcome."

Quintal thanked him. Butch said desperately, "I can't do these things much longer. Haven't you any human decency?"

"If I have," said Quintal, "it doesn't bother me."

Each tower was a sort of isolated camp where a part of the tribe lived. There was no communication over the treacherous sand, except by flying. They lived, Quintal guessed, on the rare Martian birds, and water, greens, and small animals brought from the low hills.

Chika and Hjan led the way down through a roof-trap into huge echoing halls filled with statuary and rotting furniture. Quintal prowled like a predatory beast through the two upper levels and then started down broad inlay steps toward the third.

Chika stopped, and Butch transmitted a quick mental thrill of fear from the Martian.

"Not down there," said Chika. "There is sand."

Butch said sharply, "Don't anger them, Quintal. This is their one fear—being buried alive in the sand."

Sometimes the lower levels held the sand outside, and Quintal's restless curiosity could no more endure not going down to see than his lungs could endure without air.

"I will go alone, then," he said.

Chika drew back, reluctantly indicating that the Earthman's life was his own to risk. He and Hjan watched silently as Quintal went down, their people grouped behind them, absurdly tiny on the broad steps of their ancestors.

Butch said again, urgently, "Can't you leave them alone?"

"Why should I?" demanded Quintal, in genuine irritation. "They're only freaks, like all the others."

Sand gritted under his feet, became drifts hiding the bottom of the steps. A square corridor opened to left and right. Ahead the stair led down again.

There was no light in the fourth level, and the sand was up to the Earthman's knees. He lit his pocket torch and ploughed on.

Sand. Tons of it, an ocean of it, running through the cracks of the heavy metal shutters, spreading into drifts as high as Quintal's head. The fifth level was choked.

"Let's go back," said Butch uneasily.

"There's a door down there where the stair ends. The room beyond it must take up the whole level. I'm going down."

Quintal lay flat and floundered across to a symbolic carving above the door. Gripping it, he began to dig with his free hand.

The sand rolled back into the hole he

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made, crawling as though it were alive. Quintal panted and swore, but his curiosity and his bull strength urged him on.

Butch loosened his suckers nervously, one by one. The door was visible now for almost half its length.

"Ah!" Quintal dropped into the hole, wrestling with the fastening of the door. It opened abruptly, sending him headlong.

He scrambled up and looked at the vast windowless room.

It was a foundry. There were blast furnaces and long open troughs that ran into the belly of a monstrous structure filling a third of the room. Beyond that were molds and forges and lathes.

He scowled in puzzled amazement. The ancient People of the Sky must have been great indeed, if their science had achieved these heights. Mars was like that. So many cultures had risen and died, so long ago, that no traces of them were left.

WORK in the foundry seemed to have been dropped rather suddenly. A small mountain of ore and scrap awaited the furnaces. Tools had been dropped on the floor. Quintal reflected on that.

"Must have been in the middle of a job when the quakes came," he thought, referring to the shifting of the great polar fault that in ages past had laid waste half the planet.

"The few that survived here simply battened the shutters and forgot about it. Just getting enough to eat took up most of their time, afterward."

Butch sighed. "All that art and knowledge and commerce, destroyed at one blow."

"Yeah." Quintal had just seen the hoppers for metal scrap from the tooling, and wondered why they were covered. He went over and raised a lid.

Bits of metal floated lazily up into the air.

Quintal's big hand caught a fragment. He stood staring at it, while Mars rocked and roared under his feet. After a long, long time, he whispered three words.

"Anti-gravity metal."

The enormous implications of his discovery staggered him. Money, power, glory beyond anything a man had ever had. All that and more—much more! The wonderful, the supreme personal importance of that scrap of metal came to him—metal that must be held in the cage of his fingers because it had no weight.

Words crowded into his throat. "I can go out. Out to Jupiter, to Saturn—to the ends of space!"

"Take me home," cried Butch. "Quintal, take me home first!"

"Home," repeated Quintal. The moons of Jupiter and Saturn were worlds in themselves. There would be life of some kind on them, to be conquered and sent home to Earth, to the aggrandizement of Bert Quintal. And for that, he needed Butch.

He didn't need to speak. Butch read his thoughts. Quintal felt the single convulsive shudder of the small warm body on his neck. Then he forgot Butch, and Butch's mate, and Venus. He remembered only that never, never could he be faced with his last horizon. All of space was his, to play with.

The huge enigmatic bulk through which the troughs ran he guessed must be a cyclotron. Intense bombardment must alter the atomic structure of the molten metal to neutralize the magnetism of gravity. Oh, wonderful process that the scientists of Earth had sought for and never found! Quintal began to tremble violently.

With work in progress, the cyclotron must have been ready for use. He didn't know what element the Martians might have used, but even an unstable one would not have degenerated entirely.

"I can cut the rocket tubes, and some of the after bulkheads," he said, talking aloud in his towering excitement. "With what's there, I'll have enough metal for shields. I can use the rocket fuel for the furnaces and the cyclotron.

"But I'll need men. And I don't want Larkin and all the mob of scientists and promoters and thieves that would come the instant the news was out."

He wasn't going to share this with anyone, yet. He wasn't taking any risks.

He grinned suddenly. "Chika!"

Butch said, "They won't do it. They're afraid to come down here."

"I know a way to make them."

Butch saw it, stark and ugly in Quintal's mind. "I can't," he said. "I know how it feels."

Quintal's thought answered, slow and deliberate. "Remember your mate, Butch. She might get lonesome waiting, if I should drop you through the refuse chute in space."

The blob of transparent fur twitched convulsively. Quintal laughed, and ran up the steps.

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The little people waited silently. Quintal smiled at them. "Let us go up on the roof again. I will show you my ship."

Chika grinned, and Hjan clapped her small hands. The group flooded up the steps and gathered with rustling wings around the *Starhope*.

"Come inside, Chika. And you, Hjan. I have gifts."

Chika entered the ship. Hjan danced before him on little furry feet.

Butch said, in helpless agony, "The rest of the tribe are curious. They'll be inside soon. Please!"

"Shut up," said Quintal, "and watch 'em."

HJAN was lost in wonder at the shiny instrument panel, Chika absorbed in the three-dimensional space chart. Quintal's big hand shot out and jerked the little tube from Hjan's girdle.

She cried out, half spreading her wings before she realized she couldn't fly. Chika spun about, his light body taut with the startled beginning of anger.

Quintal's heavy fist took him on the jaw. He collapsed, his wings spreading and twitching like those of a wounded bird.

Butch moaned, "Hurry!"

Hjan sprang at Quintal, her childish face hard with silent fury. One wing struck him across the face. The Earthman caught her, slapped her with callous strength.

She whimpered and fell. Quintal picked up the dazed Chika and went out, slamming the inner valve door behind him. He came to the lip of the air lock.

"Now!" said Butch. "Before they have time to think!"

"You!" shouted Quintal. "Look here!" He held Chika aloft in one big hand. "Behold your chief!"

The crowd stood thunderstruck, great eyes wide and glowing in the red dusk. Then they pressed forward, and pencil-tubes appeared.

Butch listened to their minds. "Quick," he said. "Go on!"

"Don't fire!" the Earthman roared. He stood over them, unarmed, towering, colossal, godlike. "Hjan is my prisoner. Only I can free her. If I die, she dies too."

He shook the limp body in his hand. "Chika!"

The chief stirred. His eyes opened slowly. "Yes, Earthman," he whispered.

"I need men to cut metal from my ship and work it in the foundry below. Hjan is my prisoner. Do you understand?"

"I cannot order my people into the lower levels."

"It's that, or Hjan."

Butch trembled on the back of Quintal's neck. "Now! Now!"

Quintal shook Chika high over his head. "Order them, or Hjan dies!"

Chika's mouth was set with a terrible grimness. "I cannot order," he whispered. "I will ask."

"A hundred men," cried Quintal. "A hundred, to work in the foundry."

There was a long, long moment of silence. Only sand and wind, the endless soft keening of the desert. Butch clung tautly to Quintal's neck. There was nothing more he could do.

A man stepped forward. Another followed, and another. Their wings drooped in the sullen dusk. A stifled moan went up from the women, and was silenced.

A hundred men, half the tribe, stood before Bert Quintal.

"Good," he said, and set Chika on his feet. "Drop your weapons in the sand, all of you. I'll give you tools from the ship. We'll start work now."

He could never have done it without Butch. In the days that followed, the watchful mind of the little creature hidden under his hood warned him a dozen times of danger. He put down the incipient revolts with a power that made the Martians think him supernatural.

He drove his men. They were slight, but wiry and quick. When the tubes and the bulkheads were cut, he forced them down into the hated lower dark, into the bellowing foundry.

And he made up his mind. He was going to Jupiter alone. With Butch, there was little danger. He'd give Larkin directions for finding the city and tell him to refit and follow, but he himself would go on, in the *Starhope*.

He wanted the glory he would get from that plunge into the unknown. But most of all, he wanted free space, with the outer planets toys for him to play with. He wanted it alone. It seemed that his whole life had been but a prelude, a preparation, for this dream.

Of Butch, doomed to years more of exile from Venus and his mate, he thought not at all. Butch was his, utterly. He was nothing.

At last the forward anti-gravity shield was bolted in place with infinite labor, fitted with crude controls for raising or lowering. The stern shield was almost finished. Crossing the

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roof on the morning of the last day, Quintal was filled with a wild eagerness.

"Tomorrow," he said. "Tomorrow, Butch, we're off."

BUTCH didn't answer. The silver fire of Venus burned low in the Martian dawn. It sank, and the tiny warm body on his neck shivered and stirred.

Then, suddenly, Butch said, "The wind, Quintal! It's stopped."

The Earthman halted. The desert lay motionless under a brooding sky. Silence, brittle and ominous, hung over the ochre waves of sand.

Quintal's eyes narrowed. "Storm coming. It could bury the city. We've got to hurry."

He ran down the broad stairway, past the silent women who crouched on the upper levels, waiting. Chika met him at the foundry door, his eyes deep with bitter hate.

"It is nearly done," he said. "Tonight, you will let Hjan go."

"Sure, sure," the Earthman snapped. "Get busy."

Great winged shadows leaped across the walls. Furnaces roared, and the huge wicked hum of the cyclotron filled the room. Even through that, the racket of hammers and the scream of lathes, Quintal heard the first low, snarling moan of the wind.

The winged folk faltered, looking at Chika with frightened eyes until Quintal drove them on again. He could hear the rub and strain of sand against the buried tower. If it got in, disaster would follow!

"Hurry," Quintal snarled. "Hurry, blast you!"

Chika touched him. "Let us go," he said. "We can make it to the hills if we go now."

"Please, Quintal," Butch pleaded. "They'll carry us. They can come back and finish."

"They'd drop us in the sand, you fool." Quintal was in a frenzy lest the work be left unfinished. It might take months to clear the building again.

He said, "Send your women. But you've got to finish here!"

"They won't go without their men," said Chika. "I beg you!"

"Listen," said Quintal ominously, "I'll kill your Hjan with my own hands, and you too, if you don't get in there and work."

They worked, in misery and haste and fear.

The shield floated free of its rest. They held it with ropes, like a monstrous balloon.

Quintal led the way up the steps. The women followed without sound, no more than glowing eyes and shadowy wings in the corridor. They went up on the roof.

Wind beat them with brutal hands. The sky was ocherous and sullen. Under it, all across the yellow sea, the restless sandy breakers heaved and tossed.

Quintal shouted at the men to hurry. Flailing wings fought, little wiry bodies strained. The great unwieldly shield floated into place. The wind grew, and grew.

"For Heavens sake!" cried Butch, but Chika had already caught Quintal in the murky dusk.

"We must go! Quintal, give me Hjan!"

Quintal struck him away, cursing the slowness of the men working at the bolting. Sand slashed across the roof. Great breakers of it piled and rolled against the towers, crested with choking spume.

One bolt was finished. The wind had grown to a vast shriek.

Men broke away from the *Starhope,* losing all fear of Quintal in their terror of the sand. Quintal saw them trying to take off with their women toward the distant hills, saw their thin wings ribboned and torn, their bodies hurled into the hungry desert. The last of the People of the Sky.

"Quintal!" screamed Chika. "Give me Hjan!"

The last bolt was unfinished. Quintal got the welder and did it himself, his massive body braced in ungainly strength. Then he clawed his way toward the lee side of the ship. Chika had vanished.

The ship rocked wildly under the Earthman as he stumbled through the air lock, making the two vac suits jerk in their hooks. He wondered, in a brief flash, why one flapped more than the other. But the drifts were high on the weather side, and he was mad to get away before he was buried.

He slammed the outer valve and hurried on, not bothering to close the inner one. He wasn't going beyond the atmosphere, yet.

Hjan faced him in the cabin. Her eyes burned with witch-fires.

"You killed my people," she whispered. "You killed Chika."

QUINTAL shoved past her, and she sprang on his back. She was strong, and she hated him. Her flailing wings blinded and beat him.

He didn't want to damage her. She was

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valuable, being the last. He got his hand around her throat, and when she faltered, he slapped her hard across the temple. She relaxed in his hands, and he took her and put her through the door into the after part of the ship.

Butch said softly in his mind, "Quintal, what did God give you in place of a heart?"

The Earthman swore irritably. Ripping Butch loose from his neck, he flung him after Hjan and locked the door.

The loss of Chika and his tribe meant exactly as much to him as the loss of a flock of prize chickens. He was angry, not with himself for forcing them to work too long, but with fate for ringing in this storm and upsetting his plans.

The new controls were crude, and he had had no time to test them. But he knew his ship. He got the feel of her in his hands, and the *Starhope* lifted up from the roof, silent and soft as a bird.

He brought her to rest, balancing attraction nicely against repulsion, above the storm area, and turned to the teleradio.

He put out his hand to the switch. It clenched sharply into a fist. He stood there, swearing in slowly mounting fury.

He'd been in too much of a hurry to notice before. Now he looked around the cabin. With the exception of the control panel, protected by steel bulkheads, and the heavy-duty cables that operated the shields, everything in the cabin had been smashed.

Hjan must have done it. And it was Quintal's own fault, he knew. He should have tied her, or locked her in the sleeping cabin. But she was so tiny, and there was no weapon she could use. Moreover, he had been so desperately busy that he had almost forgotten her existence.

He found the thing she had used in her destructive rage, and smiled wryly. It was his own pipe, looted from a drowned city on the other side of Mars—a heavy thing, of some petrified, vanished wood.

There was nothing for it now but to take the *Starhope* south, and give Larkin his orders direct.

Quintal realized all at once that he ached in every nerve. His head seemed to weigh as much as the *Starhope*. He had driven himself hard for too long. He needed rest, before he did anything else.

He inspected the bulkhead door. It was locked, the handle set in a one-way latch. The ventilator was open, as usual, but nothing larger than Butch could crawl through its louvres.

Butch wouldn't. He hated Quintal too much to want to be around him if he didn't have to. And a man might as well fear a blown dandelion as fear Butch.

Quintal stretched out on the cabin couch and slept heavily.

He woke before he was ready, drawn by some queer uneasiness. He sat up stiffly and cursed, and knew that nothing could be wrong.

But something was. The bulkhead door was open.

It swung idly, just a little, showing only darkness beyond. The faint double light of Mars' little moons came in through the ports. Quintal could see Jupiter, blazing gold against the black sky.

He scowled, sitting tense on the couch. Not afraid, for there was nothing to fear. Just puzzled.

Butch, moving slowly on the retractible suckers of his four paws, could have come through the ventilator. He could have walked down the door and inched the lock handle over, clinging to it with two paws while he pulled himself around with the others.

But why? Suppose he had established mental contact with Hjan? Suppose they had planned this together. What did it get them?

There was no sound from beyond the lazily swinging door.

Quintal rose. He crossed the cabin softly and went through the door. He was a tall man. The opening was low. He stooped, slightly, to clear his head.

Something dropped across his neck from over the door.

"Butch!" he yelled, startled. Then angrily, he reached up.

Hands caught his wrists in the darkness. Small furry hands, four of them, strong with the strength of hate. There was a sudden searing pain in his neck, just over the spine. He roared and plunged backward into the open space of the cabin, where he could shake himself free.

HE KNEW what was happening. Butch was sinking those prehensile, hungry fibres into his neck!

The desperate little hands clung to his wrists. Small hard thighs locked around his own. He could see faces now, in the moonlight.

Hjan's face—and Chika's.

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Hideous acid fires ate into his neck. He bunched his shoulders. Nails tore through his flesh, and then his hands were free. He reached up, to rip Butch away.

Now that it was too late, he remembered the vac suit that had seemed heavier than the other, back in the lock chamber. Chika must have hidden there, when he saw that his people were lost, beyond help. Then he had slipped through into the after part of the ship while Quintal was struggling with Hjan, blinded by her wings.

They blinded him now. Wiry bodies darted and plunged, dragging at his frantic hands. The pain ran down his spine from his neck, and up into his skull.

Butch said in his mind, "You're finished, Quintal." There was something horrible in the calm, unexcited finality of his thought.

"Yeah?" Quintal laughed, in spite of the agony. He struck out, aiming craftily. Chika whimpered and flopped away, and there was blood on the Earthman's knuckles. Hjan he caught in mid-leap and hurled her to the deck. His hands were free.

He took hold of Butch.

The stiff transparent hairs pricked his palm. Hjan got up, with Chika following. Quintal crouched, fending them off with one arm. His fingers locked under Butch's abdomen.

He could feel the fibres, crawling out like worms from their pouches. They weren't just quiescent roots, like those of a plant. They were mouths, as active and alive as his own.

He set his teeth against the pain, and pulled.

The suckers held, stubbornly. Butch's mind said to him, "It's too late, Quintal." And he laughed, a little mocking quiver of thought in Quintal's brain.

Quintal snarled, feeling the bruise of the suckers on his flesh.

"You'll never see Venus again," he said. "Your mate will die alone."

He hardly felt the lashing of wings against him, so great was the hurt inside. He knew that his wrist was clawed and bleeding, but they couldn't shake his grip. He was strong, too strong for them. He felt the waves of suffering in Butch's mind, and he grinned, a mirthless baring of the teeth.

"I have no right to see Venus again," whispered Butch. "I have no right to anything, after what I've done for you. And my mate is better to die alone, never looking into my mind again."

One sucker paw tore free. Another. The fibres tautened, running into the flesh of Quintal's neck.

"My sin is worse than yours, Quintal," said Butch softly. "I knew better. You never did. You were born without a heart. But I—I was only selfish and afraid."

"Ah!"

The last two paws came loose. The fibres strained and broke.

Quintal heard the scream in Butch's mind, though he had no mouth to make it. He lurched up, triumphant, and the wings fell away from him, and there was silence in the *Starhope*.

The Earthman laughed harshly. "You aren't so smart, Butch. It was a nice trick, trying to feed on me like a vampire. But it didn't work."

He looked at the Martians.

"I have a pair of 'em, now. And all I have to do is find Larkin, take him to the city, and wait until he fits out the big ship. I'll still have Jupiter, even if I'm not alone. And you, Butch—you know what happens to you with your feed-line broken."

Years of training had made his mind sensitive enough to hear, faintly, Butch's laughter.

"Yes, I'll die, Quintal. And you'll have Jupiter."

Quintal scowled, not understanding the laugh. The pain was fading a little. It had settled now into a single ball of flame in his neck.

He was suddenly anxious to find Larkin. There was a doctor with the base ship. Those broken root-fibres ought to come out of him as soon as possible.

QUINTAL moved toward the controls. His legs seemed distant and detached. He watched his boots scuff over the deck plates, and it was as though they were someone else's boots.

Quite suddenly, he fell.

Butch rolled out of his hand. Quintal could see the fingers of it, lying open on the deck, and he could not close them.

He whispered, "What have you done to me, Butch?"

The answer came faintly to his mind—a mind clear and sharp now, with the iron frost of fear.

"Human tissue contains the same substances that I draw from the earth—organic phosphorus, potassium, magnesium. My

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'roots,' as you call them, secrete chemicals that dissolve these substances and make them available to me.

"I wasn't trying to feed on you Quintal. I knew that you could pull me off in a few moments. Chika and Hjan knew that they could hold you helpless for only a very short time.

"But it was all I needed. The chemicals are at work inside you. You know my perceptions—I could see exactly where to go. You understand now, Quintal? The nerves of your spine are dissolving."

The tiny furry thing lay beyond Quintal's open fingers. He could see the Martians with their drooping wings, watching, and he could see Jupiter, a golden lamp beckoning beyond the port.

Butch went on, "I watched what you could not. I saw the city buried. I saw Chika's people die.

"It will be many years before the city, and its secret, are found again. All men are not as you, Quintal. Perhaps the next one who comes will use the gift of anti-gravity for good instead of evil. In the meantime, the little folk of the outer planets are free to live without chains and cages."

There was a long pause. Then, very faintly, very wearily: "It will be good to die. It will be an end to thinking."

Chika stooped. His childish face was battered, the pale fur dark with blood. He picked Butch up and laid him gently across his neck, so that their two brains were close together. As though acting under instructions from Butch, he and Hjan turned and tugged at the controls. The *Starhope* settled toward Mars.

They didn't touch Quintal. They left him where he was, twisted awkwardly, his broad head dropped back so that he stared forward, out the visiport.

He watched them bring the *Starhope* down close over the desert. He watched them set the automatic controls of the airlock. He saw Butch shudder and slip, and be taken in Hjan's hands.

They opened the valves of the lock, and set the shields for full repulsion. Then, for a brief instant before diving with open wings, they looked at Quintal, their great eyes glowing, their bodies slim and poised, with Butch a tiny still puff of fur in Hjan's hands.

They turned and dropped through the airlock. In the instant before the valve doors closed, Quintal heard the beat of their wings on the thin, cold air.

The *Starhope* lifted up from Mars, silent and soft as a bird. The atmosphere fell away, and the moons. Jupiter was a flame, a burning jewel on the dark breast of space.

Quintal lay inert on the cabin floor, his eyes wide open. A new frontier lay before him, vast and unexplored. A new world, a new horizon. Its name was not Jupiter. Its name was Death.

Weightless, joyous, swift, the *Starhope* bore him on.

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COMING NEXT ISSUE

## WHITE CATASTROPHE

*A Novelet of a Brazilian Ice Age*

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

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*Hugh Farris, Andre and Lys Berreau are transported into a weird world of eerie plant life, where time is slowed up and the struggle to survive rages madly on!*

# ALIEN

by EDMOND HAMILTON

"Slay them!" roared the alien voice

## CHAPTER I

### *Slowed-down Life*

THE dead man was standing in a little moonlit clearing in the jungle when Farris found him.

He was a small swart man in white cotton, a typical Laos tribesman of this Indo-China hinterland. He stood without support, eyes open, staring unwinkingly ahead, one foot slightly raised. And he was not breathing.

"But he can't be dead!" Farris exclaimed. "Dead men don't stand around in the jungle."

He was interrupted by Piang, his guide. That cocksure little Annamese had been losing his impudent self-sufficiency ever since they had wandered off the trail. And the motionless, standing dead man had completed his demoralization.



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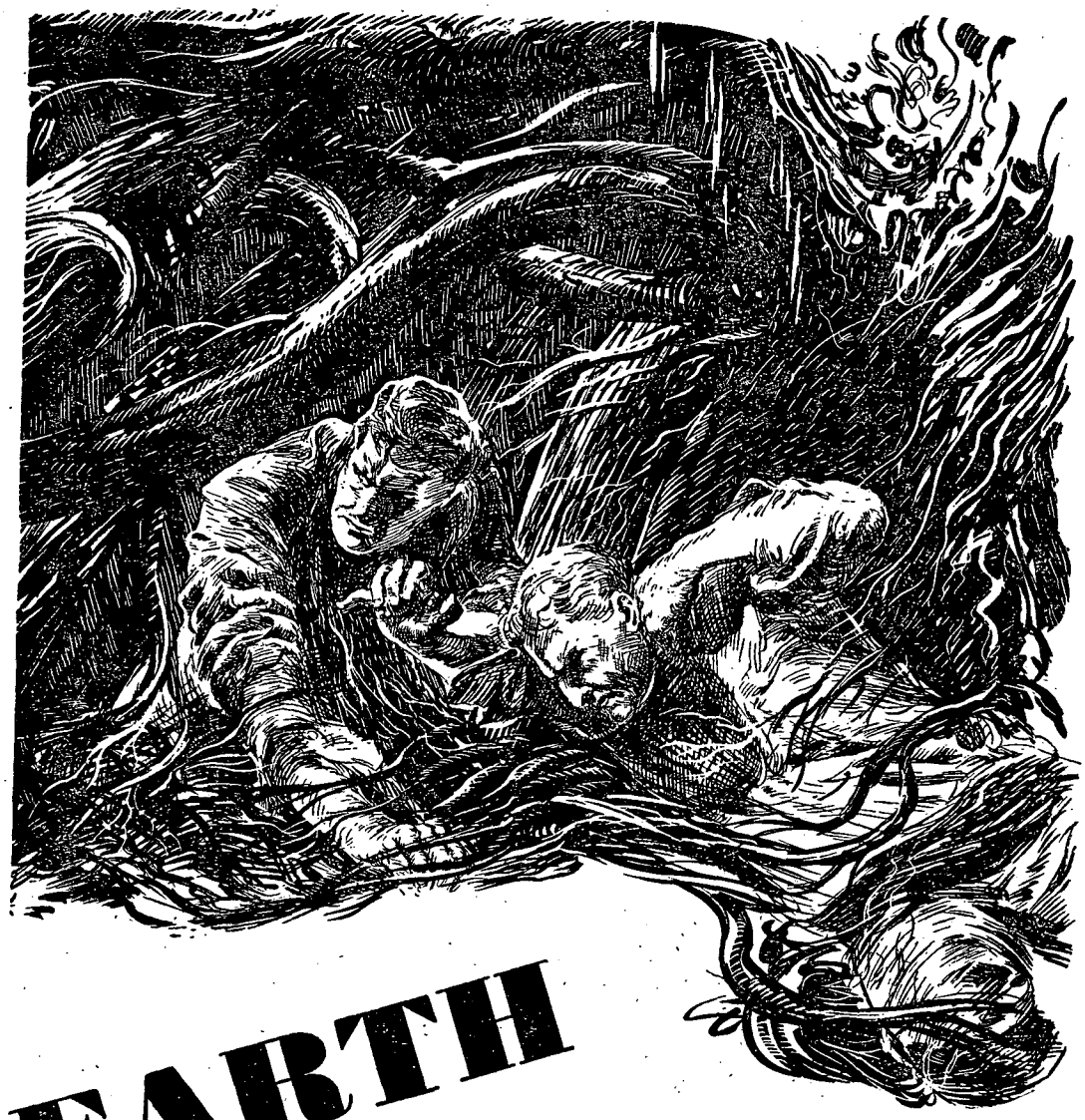

# EARTH

## a novelet

Ever since the two of them had stumbled into this grove of silk-cotton trees and almost run into the dead man, Piang had been goggling in a scared way at the still unmoving figure. Now he burst out volubly:

"The man is *hunati!* Don't touch him! We must leave here—we have strayed into a bad part of the jungle!"

Farris didn't budge. He had been a teak-hunter for too many years to be entirely skeptical of the superstitions of Southeast Asia. But, on the other hand, he felt a certain responsibility.

"If this man isn't really dead, then he's in bad shape somehow and needs help," he declared.



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"No, no!" Piang insisted. "He is *hunati!* Let us leave here quickly!"

Pale with fright, he looked around the moonlit grove. They were on a low plateau where the jungle was monsoon-forest rather than rain-forest. The big silk-cotton and ficus trees were less choked with brush and creepers here, and they could see along dim forest aisles to gigantic distant banyans that loomed like dark lords of the silver silence.

Silence. There was too much of it to be quite natural. They could faintly hear the usual clatter of birds and monkeys from down in the lowland thickets, and the cough of a tiger echoed from the Laos foothills. But the thick forest here on the plateau was hushed.

Farris went to the motionless, staring tribesman and gently touched his thin brown wrist. For a few moments, he felt no pulse. Then he caught its throb—an incredibly slow beating.

"About one beat every two minutes," Farris muttered. "How the devil can he keep living?"

HE WATCHED the man's bare chest. It rose—but so slowly that his eye could hardly detect the motion. It remained expanded for minutes. Then, as slowly, it fell again.

He took his pocket-light and flashed it into the tribesman's eyes.

There was no reaction to the light, not at first. Then, slowly, the eyelids crept down and closed, and stayed closed, and finally crept open again.

"A wink—but a hundred times slower than normal!" Farris exclaimed. "Pulse, respiration, reactions—they're all a hundred times slower. The man has either suffered a shock, or been drugged."

Then he noticed something that gave him a little chill.

The tribesman's eyeball seemed to be turning with infinite slowness toward him. And the man's raised foot was a little higher now. As though he were walking—but walking at a pace a hundred times slower than normal.

The thing was eery. There came something more eery. A sound—the sound of a small stick cracking.

Piang exhaled breath in a sound of pure fright, and pointed off into the grove. In the moonlight Farris saw.

There was another tribesman standing a hundred feet away. He, too, was motionless. But his body was bent forward in the attitude of a runner suddenly frozen. And beneath his foot, the stick had cracked.

"They worship the great ones, by the Change!" said the Annamese in a hoarse undertone. "We must not interfere!"

That decided Farris. He had, apparently, stumbled on some sort of weird jungle rite. And he had had too much experience with Asiatic natives to want to blunder into their private religious mysteries.

His business here in easternmost Indo-China was teak-hunting. It would be difficult enough back in this wild hinterland without antagonizing the tribes. These strangely dead-alive men, whatever drug or compulsion they were suffering from, could not be in danger if others were near.

"We'll go on," Farris said shortly.

Piang led hastily down the slope of the forested plateau. He went through the brush like a scared deer, till they hit the trail again.

"This is it—the path to the Government station," he said, in great relief. "We must have lost it back at the ravine. I have not been this far back in Laos, many times."

Farris asked, "Piang, what is *hunati?* This Change that you were talking about?"

The guide became instantly less voluble. "It is a rite of worship." He added, with some return of his cocksureness, "These tribesmen are very ignorant. They have not been to mission school, as I have."

"Worship of what?" Farris asked. "The great ones, you said. Who are they?"

Piang shrugged and lied readily. "I do not know. In all the great forest, there are men who can become *hunati*, it is said. How, I do not know."

Farris pondered, as he tramped onward. There had been something uncanny about those tribesmen. It had been almost a suspension of animation—but not quite. Only an incredible slowing down.

What could have caused it? And what, possibly, could be the purpose of it?

"I should think," he said, "that a tiger or snake would make short work of a man in that frozen condition."

Piang shook his head vigorously. "No. A man who is *hunati* is safe—at least, from beasts. No beast would touch him."

Farris wondered. Was that because the extreme motionlessness made the beasts ignore them? He supposed that it was some kind of fear-ridden nature-worship. Such animistic beliefs were common in this part of the world. And it was small wonder, Farris

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thought a little grimly. Nature, here in the tropical forest, wasn't the smiling goddess of temperate lands. It was something, not to be loved, but to be feared.

He ought to know! He had had two days of the Laos jungle since leaving the upper Mekong, when he had expected that one would take him to the French Government botanic survey station that was his goal.

HE BRUSHED stinging winged ants from his sweating neck, and wished that they had stopped at sunset. But the map had showed them but a few miles from the Station. He had not counted on Piang losing the trail. But he should have, for it was only a wretched track that wound along the forested slope of the plateau.

The hundred-foot ficus, dyewood and silk-cotton trees smothered the moonlight. The track twisted constantly to avoid impenetrable bamboo-hells or to ford small streams, and the tangle of creepers and vines had a devilish deftness at tripping one in the dark.

Farris wondered if they had lost their way again. And he wondered not for the first time, why he had ever left America to go into teak.

"That is the Station," said Piang suddenly, in obvious relief.

Just ahead of them on the jungled slope was a flat ledge. Light shone there, from the windows of a rambling bamboo bungalow.

Farris became conscious of all his accumulated weariness, as he went the last few yards. He wondered whether he could get a decent bed here, and what kind of chap this Berreau might be who had chosen to bury himself in such a Godforsaken post of the botanical survey.

The bamboo house was surrounded by tall, graceful dyewoods. But the moonlight showed a garden around it, enclosed by a low sappan hedge.

A voice from the dark veranda reached Farris and startled him. It startled him because it was a girl's voice, speaking in French.

"Please, Andre! Don't go again! It is madness!"

A man's voice rapped harsh answer, *"Lys, tais-toi! Je reviendrai—"*

Farris coughed diplomatically and then said up to the darkness of the veranda, "Monsieur Berreau?"

There was a dead silence. Then the door of the house was swung open so that light spilled out on Ferris and his guide.

By the light, Farris saw a man of thirty, bareheaded, in whites—a thin, rigid figure. The girl was only a white blur in the gloom.

He climbed the steps. "I suppose you don't get many visitors. My name is Hugh Farris. I have a letter for you, from the Bureau at Saigon."

There was a pause. Then, "If you will come inside, M'sieu Farris—"

In the lamplit, bamboo-walled living room, Farris glanced quickly at the two.

Berreau looked to his experienced eye like a man who had stayed too long in the tropics—his blond handsomeness tarnished by a corroding climate, his eyes too feverishly restless.

"My sister, Lys," he said, as he took the letter Farris handed.

Farris' surprise increased. A wife, he had supposed until now. Why should a girl under thirty bury herself in this wilderness?

He wasn't surprised that she looked unhappy. She might have been a decently pretty girl, he thought, if she didn't have that woebegone anxious look.

"Will you have a drink?" she asked him. And then, glancing with swift anxiety at her brother, "You'll not be going now, Andre?"

Berreau looked out at the moonlit forest, and a queer, hungry tautness showed his cheekbones in a way Farris didn't like. But the Frenchman turned back.

"No, Lys. And drinks, please. Then tell Ahra to care for his guide."

He read the letter swiftly, as Farris sank with a sigh into a rattan chair. He looked up from it with troubled eyes.

"So you come for teak?"

Farris nodded. "Only to spot and girdle trees. They have to stand a few years then before cutting, you know."

Berreau said, "The Commissioner writes that I am to give you every assistance. He explains the necessity of opening up new teak cuttings."

He slowly folded the letter. It was obvious, Farris thought, that the man did not like it, but had to make the best of orders.

"I shall do everything possible to help," Berreau promised. "You'll want a native crew, I suppose. I can get one for you." Then a queer look filmed his eyes. "But there are some forests here that are impracticable for lumbering. I'll go into that later."

Farris, feeling every moment more exhausted by the long tramp, was grateful for

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the rum and soda Lys handed him.

"We have a small extra room—I think it will be comfortable," she murmured.

He thanked her. "I could sleep on a log, I'm so tired. My muscles are as stiff as though I were *hunati* myself."

Berreau's glass dropped with a sudden crash.

## CHAPTER II

### *Sorcery of Science*

IGNORING the shattered glass, the young Frenchman strode quickly toward Farris.

"Wht do you know of *hunati?*" he asked harshly.

Farris saw with astonishment that the man's hands were shaking.

"I don't know anything except what we saw in the forest. We came upon a man standing in the moonlight who looked dead, and wasn't. He just seemed incredibly slowed down. Piang said he was *hunati.*"

A flash crossed Berreau's eyes. He exclaimed, "I knew the Rite would be called! And the others are there—"

He checked himself. It was as though the unaccustomedness of strangers had made him for a moment forget Farris' presence.

Lys' blonde head drooped. She looked away from Farris.

"You were saying?" the American prompted.

But Berreau had tightened up. He chose his words now. "The Laos tribes have some queer beliefs, M'sieu Farris. They're a little hard to understand."

Farris shrugged. "I've seen some queer Asian witchcraft, in my time. But this is unbelievable!"

"It is science, not witchcraft," Berreau corrected. "Primitive science, born long ago and transmitted by tradition. That man you saw in the forest was under the influence of a chemical not found in our pharmacopeia, but none the less potent."

"You mean that these tribesmen have a drug that can slow the life-process to that incredibly slow tempo?" Farris asked skeptically. "One that modern science doesn't know about?"

"Is that so strange? Remember, M'sieu Farris, that a century ago an old peasant woman in England was curing heart-disease with foxglove, before a physician studied her cure and discovered digitalis."

"But why on earth would even a Laos tribesman want to live so much *slower?*" Farris demanded.

"Because," Berreau answered, "they believe that in that state they can commune with something vastly greater than themselves."

Lys interrupted. "M'sieu Farris must be very weary. And his bed is ready."

Farris saw the nervous fear in her face, and realized that she wanted to end this conversation.

He wondered about Berreau, before he dropped off to sleep. There was something odd about the chap. He had been too excited about this *hunati* business.

Yet that was weird enough to upset anyone, that incredible and uncanny slowing-down of a human being's life-tempo. "To commune with something vastly greater than themselves," Berreau had said.

What gods were so strange that a man must live a hundred times slower than normal, to commune with them?

Next morning, he breakfasted with Lys on the broad veranda. The girl told him that her brother had already gone out.

"He will take you later today to the tribal village down in the valley, to arrange for your workers," she said.

Farris noted the faint unhappiness still in her face. She looked silently at the great, green ocean of forest that stretched away below this plateau on whose slope they were.

"You don't like the forest?" he ventured.

"I hate it," she said. "It smothers one, here."

Why, he asked, didn't she leave? The girl shrugged.

"I shall, soon. It is useless to stay. Andre will not go back with me."

She explained. "He has been here five years too long. When he didn't return to France, I came out to bring him. But he won't go. He has ties here now."

Again, she became abruptly silent. Farris discreetly refrained from asking her what ties she meant. There might be an Annamese woman in the background—though Berreau didn't look that type.

The day settled down to the job of being stickily tropical, and the hot still hours of the morning wore on. Farris, sprawling in a

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chair and getting a welcome rest, waited for Berreau to return.

He didn't return. And as the afternoon waned, Lys looked more and more worried.

AN HOUR before sunset, she came out onto the veranda, dressed in slacks and jacket.

"I am going down to the village—I'll be back soon," she told Farris.

She was a poor liar. Farris got to his feet. "You're going after your brother. Where is he?"

Distress and doubt struggled in her face. She remained silent.

"Believe me, I want to be a friend," Farris said quietly. "Your brother is mixed up in something here, isn't he?"

She nodded, white-faced. "It's why he wouldn't go back to France with me. He can't bring himself to leave. It's like a horrible fascinating vice."

"What is?"

She shook her head. "I can't tell you. Please wait here."

He watched her leave, and then realized she was not going down the slope but up it—up toward the top of the forested plateau.

He caught up to her in quick strides. "You can't go up into that forest alone, in a blind search for him."

"It's not a blind search. I think I know where he is," Lys whispered. "But you should not go there. The tribesmen wouldn't like it!"

Farris instantly understood. "That big grove up on top of the plateau, where we found the *hunati* natives?"

Her unhappy silence was answer enough. "Go back to the bungalow," he told her. "I'll find him."

She would not do that. Farris shrugged, and started forward. "Then we'll go together."

She hesitated, then came on. They went up the slope of the plateau, through the forest.

The westering sun sent spears and arrows of burning gold through chinks in the vast canopy of foliage under which they walked. The solid green of the forest breathed a rank, hot exhalation. Even the birds and monkeys were stifledly quiet at this hour.

"Is Berreau mixed up in that queer *hunati* rite?" Farris asked.

Lys looked up as though to utter a quick denial, but then dropped her eyes.

"Yes, in a way. His passion for botany got him interested in it. Now he's involved."

Farris was puzzled. "Why should botanical interest draw a man to that crazy drug-rite or whatever it is?"

She wouldn't answer that. She walked in silence until they reached the top of the forested plateau. Then she spoke in a whisper.

"We must be quiet now. It will be bad if we are seen here."

The grove that covered the plateau was pierced by horizontal bars of red sunset light. The great silk-cottons and ficus trees were pillars supporting a vast cathedral-nave of darkening green.

A little way ahead loomed up those huge, monster banyans he had glimpsed before in the moonlight. They dwarfed all the rest, towering bulks that were infinitely ancient and infinitely majestic.

Farris suddenly saw a Laos tribesman, a small brown figure, in the brush ten yards ahead of him. There were two others, farther in the distance. And they were all standing quite still, facing away from him.

They were *hunati,* he knew. In that queer state of slowed-down life, that incredible retardation of the vital processes.

Farris felt a chill. He muttered over his shoulder, "You had better go back down and wait."

"No," she whispered. "There is Andre."

He turned, startled. Then he too saw Berreau.

His blond head bare, his face set and white and masklike, standing frozenly beneath a big wild-fig a hundred feet to the right.

*Hunati!*

Farris had expected it, but that didn't make it less shocking. It wasn't that the tribesmen mattered less as human beings. It was just that he had talked with a normal Berreau only a few hours before. And now, to see him like this!

Berreau stood in a position ludicrously reminiscent of the old-time "living statues." One foot was slightly raised, his body bent a little forward, his arms raised a little.

LIKE the frozen tribesmen ahead, Berreau was facing toward the inner recesses of the grove, where the giant banyans loomed.

Farris touched his arm. "Berreau, you have to snap out of this."

"It's no use to speak to him," whispered the girl. "He can't hear."

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No, he couldn't hear. He was living at a tempo so slow that no ordinary sound could make sense to his ears. His face was a rigid mask, lips slightly parted to breathe, eyes fixed ahead. Slowly, slowly, the lids crept down and veiled those staring eyes and then crept open again in the infinitely slow wink. Slowly, slowly, his slightly raised left foot moved down toward the ground.

Movement, pulse, breathing—all a hundred times slower than normal. Living, but not in a human way—not in a human way at all.

Lys was not so stunned as Farris was. He realized later that she must have seen her brother like this, before.

"We must take him back to the bungalow, somehow," she murmured. "I *can't* let him stay out here for many days and nights, again!"

Farris welcomed the small practical problem that took his thoughts for a moment away from this frozen, standing horror.

"We can rig a stretcher, from our jackets," he said. "I'll cut a couple of poles."

The two bamboos, through the sleeves of the two jackets, made a makeshift stretcher which they laid upon the ground.

Farris lifted Berreau. The man's body was rigid, muscles locked in an effort no less strong because it was infinitely slow.

He got the young Frenchman down on the stretcher, and then looked at the girl. "Can you help carry him? Or will you get a native?"

She shook her head. "The tribesmen mustn't know of this. Andre isn't heavy."

He wasn't. He was light as though wasted by fever, though the sickened Farris knew that it wasn't any fever that had done it.

Why should a civilized young botanist go out into the forest and partake of a filthy primitive drug of some kind that slowed him down to a frozen stupor? It didn't make sense.

Lys bore her share of their living burden through the gathering twilight, in stolid silence. Even when the put Berreau down at intervals to rest, she did not speak.

It was not until they reached the dark bungalow and had put him down on his bed, that the girl sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

Farris spoke with a rough encouragement he did not feel. "Don't get upset. He'll be all right now. I'll soon bring him out of this."

She shook her head. "No, you must not attempt that! He must come out of it by himself. And it will take many days."

The devil it would, Farris thought. He had teak to find, and he needed Berreau to arrange for workers.

Then the dejection of the girl's small figure got him. He patted her shoulder.

"All right, I'll help you take care of him. And together, we'll pound some sense into him and make him go back home. Now you see about dinner."

She lit a gasoline lamp, and went out. He heard her calling the servants.

He looked down at Berreau. He felt a little sick, again. The Frenchman lay, eyes staring toward the ceiling. He was living, breathing—and yet his retarded life-tempo cut him off from Farris as effectually as death would.

No, not quite. Slowly, so slowly that he cauld hardly detect the movement, Berreau's eyes turned toward Farris' figure.

Lys came back into the room. She was quiet, but he was getting to know her better, and he knew by her face that she was startled.

"The servants are gone! Ahra, and the girls—and your guide. They must have seen us bring Andre in."

Farris understood. "They left because we brought back a man who's *hunati?*"

She nodded. "All the tribespeople fear the rite. It's said there's only a few who belong to it, but they're dreaded."

Farris spared a moment to curse softly the vanished Annamese. "Piang would bolt like a scared rabbit, from something like this. A sweet beginning for my job here."

"Perhaps you had better leave," Lys said uncertainly. Then she added contradictorily, "No, I can't be heroic about it! Please stay!"

"That's for sure," he told her. "I can't go back down river and report that I shirked my job because of—"

He stopped, for she wasn't listening to him. She was looking past him, toward the bed.

Farris swung around. While they two had been talking, Berreau had been moving. Infinitely slowly—but moving.

His feet were on the floor now. He was getting up. His body straightened with a painful, dragging slowness, for many minutes.

Then his right foot began to rise almost imperceptibly from the floor. He was starting to walk, only a hundred times slower than normal.

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He was starting to walk toward the door.

Lys' eyes had a yearning pity in them. "He is trying to go back up to the forest. He will try so long as he is *hunati.*"

Farris gently lifted Berreau back to the bed. He felt a cold dampness on his forehead.

What was there up there that drew worshippers in a strange trance of slowed-down life?

## CHAPTER III

### *Unholy Lure*

HE turned to the girl and asked, "How long will he stay in this condition?"

"A long time," she answered heavily. "It may take weeks for the *hunati* to wear off."

Farris didn't like the prospect, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"All right, we'll take care of him. You and I."

Lys said, "One of us will have to watch him, all the time. He will keep trying to go back to the forest."

"You've had enough for a while," Farris told her. "I'll watch him tonight."

Farris watched. Not only that night but for many nights. The days went into weeks, and the natives still shunned the house, and he saw nobody except the pale girl and the man who was living in a different way than other humans lived.

Berreau didn't change. He didn't seem to sleep, nor did he seem to need food or drink. His eyes never closed, except in that infinitely slow blinking.

He didn't sleep, and he did not quit moving. He was always moving, only it was in that weird, utterly slow-motion tempo that one could hardly see.

Lys had been right. Berreau wanted to go back to the forest. He might be living a hundred times slower than normal, but he was obviously still conscious in some weird way, and still trying to go back to the hushed, forbidden forest up there where they had found him.

Farris wearied of lifting the statue-like figure back into bed, and with the girl's permission tied Berreau's ankles. It did not make things much better. It was even more upsetting, in a way, to sit in the lamplit bedroom and watch Berreau's slow struggles for freedom.

The dragging slowness of each tiny movement made Farris nerves twitch to see. He wished he could give Berreau some sedative to keep him asleep, but he did not dare to do that.

He had found, on Berreau's forearm, a tiny incision stained with sticky green. There were scars of other, old incisions near it. Whatever crazy drug had been injected into the man to make him *hunati* was unknown. Farris did not dare try to counteract its effect.

Finally, Farris glanced up one night from his bored persual of an old *L'Illustration* and then jumped to his feet.

Berreau still lay on the bed, but he had just winked. Had winked with normal quickness, and not that slow, dragging blink.

"Berreau!" Farris said quickly. "Are you all right now? Can you hear me?"

Berreau looked up at him with a level, unfriendly gaze. "I can hear you. May I ask why you meddled?"

It took Farris aback. He had been playing nurse so long that he had unconsciously come to think of the other as a sick man who would be grateful to him. He realized now that Berreau was coldly angry, not grateful.

The Frenchman was untying his ankles. His movements were shaky, his hands trembling, but he stood up normally.

"Well?" he asked.

Farris shrugged. "Your sister was going up there after you. I helped her bring you back. That's all."

Berreau looked a little startled. "Lys did that? But it's a breaking of the Rite! It can mean trouble for her!"

Resentment and raw nerves made Farris suddenly brutal. "Why should you worry about Lys now, when you've made her wretched for months by your dabbling in native wizardries?"

Berreau didn't retort angrily, as he had expected. The young Frenchman answered heavily.

"It's true. I've done that to Lys."

Farris exclaimed, "Berreau, why do you do it? Why this unholy business of going *hunati*, of living a hundred times slower? What can you gain by it?"

The other man looked at him with haggard eyes. "By doing it, I've entered an alien world. A world that exists around us

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all our lives, but that we never live in or understand at all."

"What world?"

"The world of green leaf and root and branch," Berreau answered. "The world of plant life, which we can never comprehend because of the difference between its life-tempo and our life-tempo."

FARRIS began dimly to understand. "You mean, this *hunati* change makes you live at the same tempo as plants?"

Berreau nodded. "Yes. And that simple difference in life-tempo is the doorway into an unknown, incredible world."

"But how?"

The Frenchman pointed to the half-healed incision on his bare arm. "The drug does it. A native drug, that slows down metabolism, heart-action, respiration, nerve-messages, everything.

"Chlorophyll is its basis. The green blood of plant-life, the complex chemical that enables plants to take their energy direct from sunlight. The natives prepare it directly from grasses, by some method of their own."

"I shouldn't think," Farris said incredulously, "that chlorophyll could have any effect on an animal organism."

"Your saying that," Berreau retorted, "shows that your biochemical knowledge is out of date. Back in March of Nineteen Forty-Eight, two Chicago chemists engaged in mass production or extraction of chlorophyll, announced that their injection of it into dogs and rats seemed to prolong life greatly by altering the oxidation capacity of the cells.

"Prolong life greatly—yes! But it prolongs it, by slowing it down! A tree lives longer than a man, because it doesn't live so fast. You can make a man live as long—*and as slowly*—as a tree, by injecting the right chlorophyll compound into his blood."

Farris said, "That's what you meant, by saying that primitive peoples sometimes anticipate modern scientific discoveries?"

Berreau nodded. "This chlorophyll *hunati* solution may be an age-old secret. I believe it's always been known to a few among the primitive forest-folk of the world."

He looked somberly past the American. "Tree-worship is as old as the human race. The Sacred Tree of Sumeria, the groves of Dodona, the oaks of the Druids, the tree Ygdrasil of the Norse, even our own Christmas Tree—they all stem from primitive worship of that other, alien kind of life with which we share Earth.

"I think that a few secret worshippers have always known how to prepare the chlorophyll drug that enabled them to attain complete communion with that other kind of life, by living at the same slow rate for a time."

Farris stared. "But how did *you* get taken into this queer secret worship?"

The other man shrugged. "The worshippers were grateful to me, because I had saved the forests here from possible death."

He walked across to the corner of the room that was fitted as a botonical laboratory, and took down a test-tube. It was filled with dusty, tiny spores of a leprous, gray-green color.

"This is the Burmese Blight, that's withered whole great forests down south of the Mekong. A deadly thing, to tropical trees. It was starting to work up into this Laos country, but I showed the tribes how to stop it. The secret *hunati* sect made me one of them, in reward."

"But I still can't understand why an educated man like you would want to join such a crazy mumbo-jumbo," Farris said.

"*Dieu*, I'm trying to make you understand why! To show you that it was my curiosity as a botanist that made me join the Rite and take the drug!"

Berreau rushed on. "But you can't understand, any more than Lys could! You can't comprehend the wonder and strangeness and beauty of living that other kind of life!"

Something in Berreau's white, rapt face, in his haunted eyes, made Farris' skin crawl. His words seemed momentarily to lift a veil, to make the familiar vaguely strange and terrifying.

"Berreau, listen! You've got to cut this and leave here at once."

The Frenchman smiled mirthlessly. "I know. Many times, I have told myself so. But I do not go. How can I leave something that is a botanist's heaven?"

LYS had come into the room, was looking wanly at her brother's face.

"Andre, won't you give it up and go home with me?" she appealed.

"Or are you too sunken in this uncanny habit to care whether your sister breaks her heart?" Farris demanded.

Berreau flared. "You're a smug pair! You treat me like a drug addict, without

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knowing the wonder of the experience I've had! "I've gone into another world, an alien Earth that is around us every day of our lives and that we can't even see. And I'm going back again, and again."

"Use that chlorophyll drug and go *hunati* again?" Farris said grimly.

Berreau nodded defiantly.

"No," said Farris. "You're not. For if you do, we'll just go out there and bring you in again. You'll be quite helpless to prevent us, once you're *hunati.*"

The other man raged. "There's a way I can stop you from doing that! Your threats are dangerous!"

"There's no way," Farris said flatly. "Once you've frozen yourself into that slower life-tempo, you're helpless against normal people. And I'm not threatening. I'm trying to save your sanity, man!"

Berreau flung out of the room without answer. Lys looked at the American, with tears glimmering in her eyes.

"Don't worry about it," he reassured her. "He'll get over it, in time."

"I fear not," the girl whispered. "It has become a madness in his brain."

Inwardly, Farris agreed. Whatever the lure of the unknown world that Berreau had entered by that change in life-tempo, it had caught him beyond all redemption.

A chill swept Farris when he thought of it—men out there, living at the same tempo as plants, stepping clear out of the plane of animal life to a strangely different kind of life and world.

The bungalow was oppressively silent that day—the servants gone, Berreau sulking in his laboratory, Lys moving about with misery in her eyes.

But Berreau didn't try to go out, though Farris had been expecting that and had been prepared for a clash. And by evening, Berreau seemed to have got over his sulks. He helped prepare dinner.

He was almost gay, at the meal—a febrile good humor that Farris didn't quite like. By common consent, none of the three spoke of what was uppermost in their minds.

Berreau retired, and Farris told Lys, "Go to bed—you've lost so much sleep lately you're half asleep now. I'll keep watch."

In his own room, Farris found drowsiness assailing him too. He sank back in a chair, fighting the heaviness that weighed down his eyelids.

Then, suddenly, he understood. "Drugged!" he exclaimed, and found his voice little more than a whisper. "Something in the dinner!"

"Yes," said a remote voice. "Yes, Farris."

Berreau had come in. He loomed gigantic to Farris' blurred eyes. He came closer, and Farris saw in his hand a needle that dripped sticky green.

"I'm sorry, Farris." He was rolling up Farris' sleeve, and Farris could not resist. "I'm sorry to do this to you and Lys. But you *would* interfere. And this is the only way I can keep you from bringing me back."

Farris felt the sting of the needle. He felt nothing more, before drugged unconsciousness claimed him.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Incredible World*

FARRIS awoke, and for a dozed moment wondered what it was that so bewildered him. Then he realized.

It was the daylight. It came and went, every few minutes. There was the darkness of night in the bedroom, and then a sudden burst of dawn, a little period of brilliant sunlight, and then night again.

It came and went, as he watched numbly, like the slow, steady beating of a great pulse—a systole and diastole of light and darkness.

Days shortened to minutes? But how could that be? And then, as he awakened fully, he remembered.

"*Hunati!* He injected the chlorophyll drug into my blood-stream!"

Yes. He was *hunati,* now. Living at a tempo a hundred times slower than normal.

And that was why day and night seemed a hundred times faster than normal, to him. He had, already, lived through several days!

Farris stumbled to his feet. As he did so, he knocked his pipe from the arm of the chair.

It did not fall to the floor. It just disappeared instantly, and the next instant was lying on the floor.

"It fell. But it fell so fast I couldn't see it."

Farris felt his brain reel to the impact of the unearthly. He found that he was trembling violently.

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He fought to get a grip on himself. This wasn't witchcraft. It was a secret and devilish science, but it wasn't supernatural.

He, himself, felt as normal as ever. It was his surroundings, the swift rush of day and night especially, that alone told him he was changed.

He heard a scream, and stumbled out to the living-room of the bungalow. Lys came running toward him.

She still wore her jacket and slacks, having obviously been too worried about her brother to retire completely. And there was terror in her face.

"What's happened?" she cried. "The light—"

He took her by the shoulders. "Lys, don't lose your nerve. What's happened is that we're *hunati* now. Your brother did it—drugged us at dinner, then injected the chlorophyll compound into us."

"But why?" she cried.

"Don't you see? He was going *hunati* himself again, going back up to the forest. And we could easily overtake and bring him back, if we remained normal. So he changed us too, to prevent that."

Farris went into Berreau's room. It was as he had expected. The Frenchman was gone.

"I'll go after him," he said tightly. "He's got to come back, for he may have an antidote to that hellish stuff. You wait here."

Lys clung to him. "No! I'd go mad, here by myself, like this."

She was, he saw, on the brink of hysterics. He didn't wonder. The slow, pulsing beat of day and night alone was enough to unseat one's reason.

He acceded. "All right. But wait till I get something."

He went back to Berreau's room and took a big bolo-knife he had seen leaning in a corner. Then he saw something else, something glittering in the pulsing light, on the botanist's laboratory-table.

Farris stuffed that into his pocket. If force couldn't bring Berreau back, the threat of this other thing might influence him."

He and Lys hurried out onto the veranda and down the steps. And then they stopped, appalled.

The great forest that loomed before them was now a nightmare sight. It seethed and stirred with unearthly life—great branches clawing and whipping at each other as they fought for the light, vines writhing through them at incredible speed, a rustling uproar of tossing, living plant-life.

Lys shrank back. "The forest is *alive* now!"

"It's just the same as always," Farris reassured. "It's we who have changed—who are living so slowly now that the plants seem to live faster."

"And Andre is out in that!" Lys shuddered. Then courage came back into her pale face. "But I'm not afraid."

THEY started up through the forest toward the plateau of giant trees. And now there was an awful unreality about this incredible world.

Farris felt no difference in himself. There was no sensation of slowing down. His own motions and perceptions appeared normal. It was simply that all around him the vegetation had now a savage motility that was animal in its swiftness.

Grasses sprang up beneath his feet, tiny green spears climbing toward the light. Buds swelled, burst, spread their bright petals on the air, breathed out their fragrance—and died.

New leaves leaped joyously up from every twig, lived out their brief and vital moment, withered and fell. The forest was a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of colors, from pale green to yellowed brown, that rippled as the swift tides of growth and death washed over it.

But it was not peaceful nor serene, that life of the forest. Before, it had seemed to Farris that the plants of the earth existed in a placid inertia utterly different from the beasts, who must constantly hunt or be hunted. Now he saw how mistaken he had been.

Close by, a tropical nettle crawled up beside a giant fern. Octopus-like, its tendrils flashed around and through the plant. The fern writhed. Its fronds tossed wildly, its stalks strove to be free. But the stinging death conquered it.

Lianas crawled like great serpents among the trees, encircling the trunks, twining themselves swiftly along the branches, striking their hungry parasitic roots into the living bark.

And the trees fought them. Farris could see how the branches lashed and struck against the killer vines. It was like watching a man struggle against the crushing coils of the python.

Very likely. Because the trees, the plants,

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knew. In their own strange, alien fashion, they were as sentient as their swifter brothers.

Hunter and hunted. The strangling lianas, the deadly, beautiful orchid that was like a cancer eating a healthy trunk, the leprous, crawling fungi—they were the wolves and the jackals of this leafy world.

Even among the trees, Farris saw, existence was a grim and never-ending struggle. Silk-cotton and bamboo and ficus-tree—they too knew pain and fear and the dread of death.

He could hear them. Now, with his aural nerves slowed to an incredible receptivity, he heard the voice of the forest, the true voice that had nothing to do with the familiar sounds of wind in the branches.

The primal voice of birth and death that spoke before ever man appeared on Earth, and would continue to speak after he was gone.

At first he had been conscious only of that vast, rustling uproar. Now he could distinguish separate sounds—the thin screams of grass blades and bamboo-shoots thrusting and surging out of the earth, the lash and groan of enmeshed and dying branches, the laughter of young leaves high in the sky, the stealthy whisper of the coiling vines.

And almost, he could hear thoughts, speaking in his mind. The age-old thoughts of the trees.

Farris felt a freezing dread. He did not want to listen to the thoughts of the trees.

And the slow, steady pulsing of darkness and light went on. Days and nights, rushing with terrible speed over the *hunati.*

Lys, stumbling along the trail beside him, uttered a little cry of terror. A snaky black vine had darted out of the brush at her with cobra swiftness, looping swiftly to encircle her body.

Farris swung his bolo, slashed through the vine. But it struck out again, growing with that appalling speed, its tip groping for him.

He slashed again with sick horror, and pulled the girl onward, on up the side of the plateau.

"I am afraid!" she gasped. "I can hear the thoughts—the thoughts of the forest!"

"It's your own imagination!" he told her. "Don't listen!"

But he too could hear them! Very faintly, like sounds just below the threshold of hearing. It seemed to him that every minute—or every minute-long day—he was able to get more clearly the telepathic impulses of these organisms that lived an undreamed-of life of their own, side by side with man, yet forever barred from him, except when man was *hunati.*

IT seemed to him that the temper of the forest had changed, that his slaying of the vine had made it aware of them. Like a crowd aroused to anger, the massed trees around them grew wrathful. A tossing and moaning rose among them.

Branches struck at Farris and the girl, lianas groped with blind heads and snake-like grace toward them. Brush and bramble clawed them spitefully, reaching out thorny arms to rake their flesh. The slender saplings lashed them like leafy whips, the swift-growing bamboo spears sought to block their path, canes clattering together as if in rage.

"It's only in our own minds!" he said to the girl. "Because the forest is living at the same rate as we, we imagine it's aware of us."

He had to believe that, he knew. He had to, because when he quit believing it there was only black madness.

"No!" cried Lys. "No! The forest knows we are here."

Panic fear threatened Farris' self-control, as the mad uproar of the forest increased. He ran, dragging the girl with him, sheltering her with his body from the lashing of the raging forest.

They ran on, deeper into the mighty grove upon the plateau, under the pulsing rush of day and darkness. And now the trees about them were brawling giants, great silk-cotton and ficus that struck crashing blows at each other as their branches fought for clear sky—contending and terrible leafy giants beneath which they two humans were pigmies.

But the lesser forest beneath them still tossed and surged with wrath, still plucked and tore at the two running humans. And still, and clearer, stronger, Farris' reeling mind caught the dim impact of unguessable telepathic impulses.

Then, drowning all those dim and raging thoughts, came vast and dominating impulses of greater majesty, thought-voices deep and strong and alien as the voice of primal Earth.

"Stop them!" they seemed to echo in Farris' mind. "Stop them! Slay them! For they are our enemies!"

Lys uttered a trembling cry. "Andre!"

Farris saw him, then. Saw Berreau ahead,

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standing in the shadow of the monster banyans there. His arms were upraised toward those looming colossi, as though in worship. Over him towered the leafy giants, dominating all the forest.

"Stop them! Slay them!"

They thundered, now, those majestic thought-voices that Farris' mind could barely hear. He was closer to them—closer—

He knew, then, even though his mind refused to admit the knowledge. Knew whence those mighty voices came, and why Berreau worshipped the banyans.

And surely they were godlike, these green colossi who had lived for ages, whose arms reached skyward and whose aerial roots drooped and stirred and groped like hundreds of hands!

Farris forced that thought violently away. He was a man, of the world of men, and he must not worship alien lords.

Berreau had turned toward them. The man's eyes were hot and raging, and Farris knew even before Berreau spoke that he was no longer altogether sane.

"Go, both of you!" he ordered. "You were fools, to come here after me! You killed as you came through the forest, and the forest knows!"

"Berreau, listen!" Farris appealed. "You've got to go back with us, forget this madness!"

Berreau laughed shrilly. "Is it madness that the Lords even now voice their wrath against you? You hear it in your mind, but you are afraid to listen! Be afraid, Farris! There is reason! You have slain trees for many years, as you have just slain here—and the forest knows you for a foe."

"Andre!" Lys was sobbing, her face half-buried in her hands.

Farris felt his mind cracking under the impact of the crazy scene. The ceaseless, rushing pulse of light and darkness, the rustling uproar of the seething forest around them, the vines creeping snakelike and branches whipping at them and giant banyans rocking angrily overhead.

"*This* is the world that man lives in all his life, and never sees or senses!" Berreau was shouting. "I've come into it, again and again. And each time, I've heard more clearly the voices of the Great Ones!

"The oldest and mightiest creatures on our planet! Long ago, men knew that and worshipped them for the wisdom they could teach. Yes, worshipped them as Ygdrasil and the Druid Oak and the Sacred Tree! But modern men have forgotten this other Earth. Except me, Farris—except me! I've found wisdom in this world such as you never dreamed. And your stupid blindness is not going to drag me out of it!"

FARRIS realized then that it was too late to reason with Berreau. The man had come too often and too far into this other Earth that was as alien to humanity as though it lay across the universe.

It was because he had feared that, that he had brought the little thing in his jacket pocket. The one thing with which he might force Berreau to obey.

Farris took it out of his pocket. He held it up so that the other could see it.

"You know what it is, Berreau! And you know what I can do with it, if you force me to!"

Wild dread leaped into Berreau's eyes as he recognized that glittering little vial from his own laboratory.

"The Burmese Blight! You wouldn't, Farris! You wouldn't turn that loose *here*!"

"I will!" Farris said hoarsely. "I will, unless you come out of here with us, now!"

Raging hate and fear were in Berreau's eyes as he stared at that innocent corked glass vial of gray-green dust.

He said thickly, "For this, I will kill!"

Lys screamed. Black lianas had crept upon her as she stood with her face hidden in her hands. They had writhed around her legs like twining serpents, they were pulling her down.

The forest seemed to roar with triumph. Vine and branch and bramble and creeper surged toward them. Dimly thunderous throbbed the strange telepathic voices.

"Slay them!" said the trees.

Farris leaped into that coiling mass of vines, his bolo slashing. He cut loose the twining lianas that held the girl, sliced fiercely at the branches that whipped wildly at them.

Then, from behind, Berreau's savage blow on his elbow knocked the bolo from his hand.

"I told you not to kill, Farris! I told you!"

"Slay them!" pulsed the alien thought.

Berreau spoke, his eyes not leaving Farris. "Run, Lys. Leave the forest. This—murderer must die."

He lunged as he spoke, and there was death in his white face and clutching hands.

Farris was knocked back, against one of the giant banyan trunks. They rolled,

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grappling. And already the vines were sliding around them—looping and enmeshing them, tightening upon them!

It was then that the forest shrieked.

A cry telepathic and auditory at the same time—and dreadful. An utterance of alien agony beyond anything human.

Berreau's hands fell away from Farris. The Frenchman, enmeshed with him by the coiling vines, looked up in horror.

Then Farris saw what had happened. The little vial, the vial of the blight, had smashed against the banyan trunk as Berreau charged.

And that little splash of gray-green mould was rushing through the forest faster than flame! The blight, the gray-green killer from far away, propagating itself with appalling rapidity! *"Dieu!"* screamed Berreau. *"Non—non—"*

Even normally, a blight seems to spread swiftly. And to Farris and the other two, slowed down as they were, this blight was a raging cold fire of death.

It flashed up trunks and limbs and aerial roots of the majestic banyans, eating leaf and spore and bud. It ran triumphantly across the ground, over vine and grass and shrub, bursting up other trees, leaping along the airy bridges of lianas.

And it leaped among the vines that enmeshed the two men! In mad death-agonies the creepers writhed and tightened.

Farris felt the musty mould in his mouth and nostrils, felt the construction as of steel cables crushing the life from him. The world seemed to darken—

Then a steel blade hissed and flashed, and the pressure loosened. Lys' voice was in his ears, Lys' hand trying to drag him from the dying, tightening creepers that she had partly slashed through. He wrenched free. "My brother!" she gasped.

WITH the bolo he sliced clumsily through the mass of dying writhing snake-vines that still enmeshed Berreau.

Berreau's face appeared, as he tore away the slashed creepers. It was dark purple, rigid, his eyes staring and dead. The tightening vines had caught him around the throat, strangling him.

Lys knelt beside him, crying wildly. But Farris dragged her to her feet.

"We have to get out of here! He's dead—but I'll carry his body!"

"No, leave it," she sobbed. "Leave it here, in the forest."

Dead eyes, looking up at the death of the alien world of life into which he had now crossed, forever! Yes, it was fitting.

Farris' heart quailed as he stumbled away with Lys through the forest that was rocking and raging in its death-throes.

Far away around them, the gray-green death was leaping on. And fainter, fainter, came the strange telepathic cries that he would never be sure he had really heard.

"We die, brothers! We die!"

And then, when it seemed to Farris that sanity must give way beneath the weight of alien agony, there came a sudden change.

The pulsing rush of alternate day and night lengthened in tempo. Each period of light and darkness was longer now, and longer—

Out of a period of dizzying semi-consciousness, Farris came back to awareness. They were standing unsteadily in the blighted forest, in bright sunlight.

And they were no longer *hunati.*

The chlorophyll drug had spent its force in their bodies, and they had come back to the normal tempo of human life.

Lys looked up dazedly, at the forest that now seemed static, peaceful, immobile—and in which the gray-green blight now crept so slowly they could not see it move.

"The same forest, and it's still writhing in death!" Farris said huskily. "But now that we're living at normal speed again, we can't see it!"

"Please, let us go!" choked the girl. "Away from here, at once!"

It took but an hour to return to the bungalow and pack what they could carry, before they took the trail toward the Mekong.

Sunset saw them out of the blighted area of the forest, well on their way toward the river.

"Will it kill all the forest?" whispered the girl.

"No. The forest will fight back, come back, conquer the blight, in time. A long time, by our reckoning—years, decades. But to *them,* that fierce struggle is raging on even now."

And as they walked on, it seemed to Farris that still in his mind there pulsed faintly from far behind that alien, throbbing cry.

"We die, brothers!"

He did not look back. But he knew that he would not come back to this or any other forest, and that his profession was ended, and that he would never kill a tree again.

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# Quite Logical

By ROG PHILLIPS

Miss Henrietta shrieked and flung her arms around Gabby's neck

The null System of logic, like all others, depends on consistency. (Null S means non-sober).

GABBY JONES staggered to an unsteady halt.

"Where sheldom ish heard—"

His off key song died down as he concentrated on the sensations from his slightly alcohol-fried optic nerves.

In a vague mental stagger he took in enough to recognize the essential features of his decrepit thirty-five Ford. His mind, (in the manner of a butterfly lighting on a

**The Pink Rabbits from Venus Were Out of this World!**



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slender weed stalk in a spring breeze), settled with self-satisfying stability on the two cases of rye whisky on the back seat.

"A dishcouragin' word," he droned happily.

With patience that would have done credit to any scientist he began the task of guiding his footsteps around to the driver's side of the car. The occasional pedestrians ignored the difficulties of his progress. They were used to the periodic appearance of Gabby in town, drunk.

Subconscious reflexes acquired in his younger and more-sober days enabled Gabby Jones to get his car in motion. The street was very wide and very short—and very vacant, since the owners of the half dozen local automobiles had, with customary foresight, taken their cars off the street when they learned Gabby was on his way to town.

The sun, a huge red orb half set on the western horizon across the wavering desert prairie landscape, watched his progress out of town with the same degree of grease filmed stupidity with which a cold fried egg watches a descending fork.

Forgotten were the two weeks of body-racking, soul-torturing soberness during which he had panned enough gold to pay for another supply of whisky. On the seat beside him was a bottle two thirds empty, its contents transferred to the veins and arteries and nerves that were so painfully sensitive without it.

Through the dusty windshield he kept his landmark, Bald Peak, always in view, on the very practical working theory that so long as it stayed in the windshield he was headed toward it and never mind the road, which had little to distinguish it from the surrounding prairie anyway.

The car rode on at comfortable speed, taking the holes and humps with rolling gracefulness. Rabbits scurried out of the way in high leaps. A snake rattled warningly and dented its nose against a tire before being run over.

UNAWARE of these happenings in the world outside, Gabby drove cheerfully along, his own, now comfortable universe enclosing him protectively.

"Where sheldom izh heard," he wailed discordantly.

The redly bloated sun could take no more. It dropped below the horizon.

"Where sheddom izh heard," a voice sounded beside him. "Sheddom—shelldom—where sheldom izh heard."

"That'sh right," Gabby said sociably. It didn't occur to him to remember that he had left town alone, and that by all rights there should be no one with him now. Smiling broadly through his unkept beard he turned his head.

The hairless, pink skinned rabbit sitting beside him returned his smile with one that might very well have graced the face of a society matron as she smiled at the foreman of a glue factory showing her through the plant. Its even pinker nose wiggled with slow thoughtfulness in the best rabbit tradition. Its ears, though small in proportion to its mansized head, extended upward to bend over flexibly where they met the roof of the car.

"Well, whatta ya know!" Gabby murmured. He looked straight ahead through the windshield and shook his head violently, then turned to inspect the creature more closely. Unconsciously his right hand groped for the bottle on the seat beside him.

"Pink!" he said. "Shay, rabbit. You're all right! Shtick around and keep me company."

"All right, shtick around," the pink rabbit said with perfect duplication of Gabby's voice. His nose wiggling speeded up slightly in friendliness. At least Gabby interpreted it as friendliness. He extended a somewhat soiled, weatherbeaten hand.

"Gabby'sh the name," he said. "Gabby Jonezh."

The pink rabbit extended his own quite a bit smaller hand with its five fragile, almost human fingers. Gabby took it and pumped enthusiastically.

"Ahnee'sh the name," the rabbit said. "Ahnee, grahl ko pahhin Zree, ko Dulvir, ihin bah do ko Uhluhlahnt."

"Pleashed to meetcha, Arny," Gabby said with grave solemnity, pumping Ahnee's hand once more before releasing it. . . .

The cabin was perhaps twelve feet long and nine feet wide. It was well constructed so that the years of neglect had made their inroads slowly. The floor was littered with burnt matches, cigarette butts, caps from whiskey bottles, and sand.

In a far corner, its lower half concealed behind the head of Gabby's bunk, was a tombstone of other times—a bookcase tightly packed with books well preserved by the desert air. Fine sand covered them with a

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layer of gray. The pink rabbit approached this with ill concealed eagerness.

"Booksh," Gabby explained, turning his head from the task of breaking out another bottle long enough to play the host. "Help yourshelf. Never read 'em any more."

"Booksh?" the pink rabbit echoed. "Read?" He took a book from a shelf with the care of one handling a rare and irreplaceable treasure.

Gabby watched, his eyes straddling the neck of the bottle as he tipped it up. His thirst satisfied, he set the bottle on the edge of the table and staggered over to where Ahnee stood turning the pages. He took the book from him with a patronizing air and squinted at it in the half light.

"Now thish," he said, pointing a grimy finger. "Izha title. *Outline of Hishtory.*"

"*Outline of Hishtory,*" the pink rabbit repeated, carefully imitating Gabby's slurred diction.

"Hishtory," Gabby expanded importantly. "Izh what—izh what—well, it'sh hishtory, that'sh all. Don't bozher we wish foolish questionsh."

"Read," the pink rabbit said mildly.

"Oh-kay, oh-kay OH-KAY," Gabby said irritably. "Now lishen, li'l pink rabbit. Lesh you and me be good friendzh." He dropped onto the bunk and stretched out, the book slipping from his lax fingers to the floor. "Good friendsh," he muttered. Then with a deep sigh he began to snore. . . .

WHEN he awakened it was with a feeling that he had slept too long. There was something radically wrong. He sat up, rubbing his eyes. His body was crying of alcohol starvation in loud, peremptory tones.

There were several pink rabbits in the shack, watching him with wide eyes, their frondlike pink ears stiffly erect. He blinked blearily at them and stood up.

Suddenly he noticed that the air instead of being furnace hot was delightfully cool. A mild breeze caressed his skin. He looked through a dirty window and saw the usual signs—glaring sun, dancing heat waves, and arid desolation.

His eyes searched the shack. In the corner where the fifty-gallon drum of kerosene had always been kept was a similar drum, but coated with soft blue enamel. There were gleaming chrome faucets on its front.

Gabby approached it, examining it. The cool breeze was coming from a grill work on the top. He turned one of the faucets experimentally. A stream of water came out, dropping into the catch basin. He stuck a finger in the stream and found it almost ice cold. From somewhere inside came the sounds of something whirring.

He shut off the ice water and tried another faucet. The water that came out was hot. He tried the third faucet. A stream of slightly colored fluid ran out, into the drain. He wet his finger in it and tasted it cautiously. With an enraged roar he shut off the faucet.

Dashing over to the table, he examined his cases of whisky anxiously. Not a single bottle was missing. Puzzled, he returned to the bluely glistening contraption and caught a little of the fluid in the palm of his hand and drank it. It was rye whisky without a doubt! Cool, and with a more refreshing quality to it than that straight from the warm bottles.

A paper cup dispenser was fastened to the wall of the shack within handy reach of the faucets. He filled a cup with the whisky from the faucet, thinking of the precious fluid that had gone into the drain.

The pink rabbits watched all this silently, their pink noses wriggling with slow concentration. Gabby watched back at them now, wiggling his own nose in mocking disrespect. He waited until he could feel the drink seeping into his blood stream, then continued his examination of the thing.

He carefully examined it in search of wires, without finding any. The absence of wires pleased him. A dim logic in a dusty corner of his mind whispered that no wires meant pink rabbits. The connection didn't straighten itself out, but it was there somewhere, and he had had too many experiences with delusions to think he could walk through them like they weren't there.

He got around to a valid doubt that he had had a real drink from the dohickus. If it were no more real than the pink rabbits any drink from it wouldn't be real either. That meant he had actually had only the one drink from the bottle—and he could therefore stand another.

He started over to the table to get it, then paused. An even better idea hit him. He turned back to the faucets and poured a generous drink.

During his years of personal experience with strong drink Gabby had found one important difference between the steady, day

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after day type of drinking, and the all out, body saturating, three-day spree. That difference was that in the spree his conscious mind blanked out after a certain point, and stayed blanked out until the day of the Awakening.

Consequently, when consciousness awakened to the cosmically proportioned agony that walked with hobnailed boots along every nerve of his brain and body, and the last thing he could remember was four pink rabbits dancing a jig in grave, slow motion, he knew that he had at least three of the worst days of his life just before him.

FEELING like an exposed nerve trying to chew hard candy, he climbed out of bed and crept over to the table to confirm his self diagnosis. Tipping up a nearly empty bottle, he let the thin liquid drain into his mouth. It blanketed his tongue with a sickening, nauseating, soapsuds feeling. He forced it down his throat and felt it bounce on the pit of his stomach and start back up.

Half an hour later he had managed to down a small glass of grapefruit juice from his medical stores, kept for just this emergency for over a year now.

There was a growing wonder in his mind. How could he have drunk too much whisky if the whisky was a delusion? He glanced over in the oil drum corner to make sure his delusion about it was gone. A pastel blue object gleamed at him with friendship, its three chrome faucets winking knowingly. And for the first time he noticed that the air in the room was quite cool.

A sound made him turn his head. The door opened half way. A pink rabbit stuck its head inside and wiggled its nose at him, then ducked out, slamming the door with a concussion that set off an atom bomb just in back of Gabby's head.

He closed his eyelids tightly to keep his eyes from dropping out until the radiations dissipated, then opened them again.

A vague process of rationalization was beginning in his tortured mind. It came up with a conclusion that fitted all the facts. He had just seen a pink rabbit, and he was perfectly sober. The liquor-dispenser air-conditioner with hot and cold running water was still in the corner in place of the kerosene drum.

A sober man can't see the delusions that kept him company while he was drunk. Therefore, Q.E.D., etcetera, etcetera, he must still be drunk, and his soberness and inability to tolerate alcohol were the first signs of oncoming delirium.

Once he accepted the conclusion that he was still drunk everything became clear. The grapefruit juice he was forcing down, sip by nasty sip, was in reality rye whisky. The can he poured it from was a fantasy of his mind painted on the factual object, a whisky bottle. The pain that tortured every part of his body was a rationalizing offshoot of the set of delusions.

Somewhere under the layers of delusion must still be a sane part of his mind, taking the whisky in measured doses, while "up above" he imagined it was grapefruit juice, and imagined he was forcing it down.

This belief comforted him immeasurably; and it was logically sound, fitting every fact into place, leaving none out. The tempo of the devil drums in his mind grew less unbearable.

He entertained no delusions about his delusions going away, now that he knew they were delusions. Delusions seldom did that. They continued their course with sublime indifference to their lack of reality.

Gabby resigned himself to three days of gradually lessening Hell even though he had proved beyond reasonable doubt that that Hell was strictly imaginary. It was comforting, however, to know that the grapefruit juice was actually rye whisky, even though by every test of the senses it was not.

He filled his mouth with the stuff and gulped it painfully, then chuckled wisely.

The door opened again and several pink rabbits came in. Gabby counted them and decided there were fourteen. He recognized one of them as his old pal, Arny. Arny tossed him a smile and nose wiggle, then proceded to ignore him completely.

The other rabbits formed a semicircle facing the bookcase. During the next hour or so there was much passing of books and rapid jabbering, with occasional words and sentences in perfect duplication of Gabby's own slurred pronunciation. . . .

Two weeks passed, during which Gabby recovered from his spell of delusory soberness and became his usual happy self, consuming a neat fifth of rye every twenty-four hours.

HE HAD worked out a balance between the whisky of the faucet and the whisky in the bottles. He had never once

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doubted that a drink from the chrome faucet was purely imaginary; and for that reason he still used about half from the bottles, surmising that purely imaginary whisky couldn't keep him drunk though it could help stretch his supply of the real stuff.

He was getting used to the pink rabbits and their constant questions about everything he knew. At times he paused to wonder at the magnificence of his imagination that could conjure up such interesting creatures. They were very likeable in a rabbitish sort of way. They had a practicality about them like that of Bugs Bunny in an animated cartoon he had seen long ago during a visit to Los Angeles.

And they could pop up with some of the darndest questions in their careful imitation of Gabby's slurring diction. They took spells of being interested in different subjects. One day it would be geography. Another day it would be politics. Or something else.

September the Seventh, Nineteen Fifty-two, was most noted, perhaps, for the unique headlines on the front page of every newspaper all over the country. These headlines varied according to the news sense of the individual editor who elaborated on the original title of the press release. One said PINK ELEPHANT SEES MAN. The nearest to the truth said, DRUNK RABBIT SEES PINK MAN.

A later edition reported a wave of pink rabbits in all parts of the country seeing pink men. Actually it was people seeing pink rabbits, but the other way around caught the fancy of editors and created a wave of hilarity enhanced by the sober accounts of serious persons who claimed they really did see them.

A Mrs. Abretha B. Barnes became immortal by getting the credit for being the first person to see one of them.

"I was walking home alone from a late show," she said in reporting it to the local newspaper. "I had *not* been drinking. I was passing an alley when this—this *thing* came staggering out. It reeled toward me. The nearest I can describe its appearance is that it looked like a skinned rabbit would look through a big magnifying glass.

"It staggered like it was drunk, coming right up to me. I was rooted to the spot. I tried to scream but I couldn't utter a sound. Then it held out one of its paws, and I could swear it had fingers; and it said in a slurred, drunken voice, 'Pleashed to meet you. Shay, what'sh your name? *Hic! Huh?*' And it stood there weaving on its feet, smiling like a persimmon with a rabbit nose, big as life and twice as real.

"Finally I got my voice back and screamed. Then I ran as fast as I could. I don't know what became of the thing, but I'd swear I wasn't suffering from hallucinations."

The reporter who listened to Mrs. Abretha B. Barnes' account very unkindly reported that she had a pink complexion which had a habit of becoming even pinker than usual when she was embarrassed.

Another report came from California where three boys reported being out hiking when a flying saucer landed near them. A pink rabbit got out of the flying saucer and approached them, weaving drunkenly, a silly smile on its bald, rabbit face. It had a bottle of whisky in one paw and held it out to them.

"Wanna li'l drink, boyzh?" it asked in a slurred voice. "Come on. Let—let'sh be friendzh."

When asked if the pink rabbit hiccoughed, one of the boys was uncertain. The other boys insisted it had hiccoughed with almost every word.

The boys were turned over to their fathers and later confessed having made up the whole story as a gag. . . .

IT WAS a very discouraged group of pink rabbits that trailed into Gabby's shack the morning after and settled down for a day of reading.

Gabby sensed something wrong. The puckered smiles were absent. There was a strange glaze to the large dark eyes of each rabbit. Ears that were usually a forest of swaying pink fronds were now a level mat of dandelion leaves.

"What'sha matter wish you thish morning?" Gabby complained.

Haltingly they confessed what they had done and their total failure to communicate with other members of the human race.

"Thash what I ecshpected," Gabby said in a superior voice. "You can't jush go up and talk to a pershon. You need an intro—an interducshun from an ol' friend. *Thash* what you need."

He pondered the problem seriously. The pink rabbits waited anxiously.

"Firsht," he continued. "The people musht have a few under the breath. *Quite* a few, I should shay. And thash a problem."

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"We would like to meet the Preshident," Ahnee spoke timidly, thoroughly subdued.

"Thash a big problem," Gabby said soothingly. "The F.B.I. wouldn't like it. No shir!"

He thought again for several minutes. An idea struck him. He chuckled. He was enjoying this immensely, and like the poker player who thinks the game is just for fun and not for keeps, he was willing to take bold, decisive steps.

"Lishen, rabbitsh," he said in a hoarse, confidential whisper bending forward. And he sketched a plan all the more daring because it seemed to have no possibility of execution. In that he could not possibly have known the full resources of the pink rabbits, to whom almost nothing was impossible.

* * * * *

Miss Henrietta Smyth lifted her virgin frame out of the Chippendale chair, inherited from her ancestors along with the house and block square walled-in grounds, and walked it across the deep oriental rug to the front door. Her knees squeaked a little which was well in keeping with her somewhat wrinkled face and iron-gray curls. She had ignored the fortieth anniversary of her sixteenth birthday only a week before, and hope was still the fuel that her heart ran on.

That hope was patent on her face now as she approached the door. It had been three weeks since anyone had tinkled the antique bell to announce their presence on the stoop, and it could not be the grocer because she had paid her bill.

Her teeth glistened with porcelain perfection as she put on a smile before opening the door. The smile stayed there for three long seconds after she got the door open. Then she fainted.

Gabby looked helplessly at her on the floor, while the dozen or so pink rabbits clustered behind him wriggled their noses in curiosity.

"She'zh all right," Gabby said. "Jush fainted." He dropped to his knees and fanned her face with the palm of his hand.

The pink rabbits suddenly burst into purposive motion, dragging a long plastic hose through the door. In the bathroom just off the living room they clamped the end of the hose onto a cold water faucet. After it was secure, they turned the faucet on.

Meanwhile, in the front hall, Gabby was pathetically rubbing Henrietta's hands when her eyes began to flutter with returning consciousness. When they opened they looked at him with a return of fear, then glanced hastily around. No pink rabbits were in evidence at the moment. This reassured her.

She fluttered her eyes again and moaned.

"Are you all right, Mish?" Gabby asked.

"I feel better, thank you," Henrietta said. "Would you help me up?" She accompanied her question with an arm that angled bonily around Gabby's hairy neck.

HE DREW back in alarm. The arm stayed in place, drawing Miss Henrietta Smythe up with him. He found his own arm circling her waist, helping her to rise to her feet. She leaned against him, resting her gray curls on his shoulder.

"I—I feel rather faint," she said. "Please assist me to a chair."

Gabby boosted her across the room to a chair. It was a love seat. When he managed to get her seated, she fluttered her eyes gratefully.

One of the pink rabbits dashed through the room from the bathroom to the front door. Henrietta shrieked and flung her arms around Gabby's neck.

The purity of her curls covered Gabby's whiskered face and sent a faint perfume of lilacs into his nostrils.

"Don't be afraid—" He hesitated.

"Henrietta," she said. "*Miss* Henrietta Smythe."

"Gabby Jonesh," Gabby said, breathing in the lilac smell.

"Oh, Gabby," Henrietta said, putting a world of intimacy in the one word, Gabby. "Those pink rabbits."

"They're jush friendsh of mine," Gabby explained. "Shay! You mush be drunk too!"

The wisdom of the serpent came into Miss Henrietta's pale blue eyes. She drew her head back and looked at Gabby, still not releasing him.

"Yesh," she said, giggling. Then she kissed him. What did pink rabbits matter?

"Twenty thoushand gallonsh of rye whisky forshed into the water mainzh," Ahnee said with satisfaction to his fellow rabbits. "That should do the trick." He hiccoughed loudly to emphasize his remark. "Shinsh thish faushet leadsh to the water main to the White Housh all we have to do izh wait."

"*Mpf*," Gabby mumbled. Miss Henrietta

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merely tightened her hold around Gabby's neck and pressed her face closer against his whiskers. The assembled pink rabbits watched these goings on with interest.

Gabby placed his hands against Miss Henrietta's collar bones and pushed firmly. Her arms gave way and slid until only her clenched fingers held her hold around his neck. She looked at the pink rabbits with bright lights playing around in her eyes.

"Any friendsh of Gabby'sh are friendsh of mine," she giggled.

A bottle miraculously appeared in Ahnee's hand. He held it out. Gabby took it and unscrewed the lid while Miss Henrietta girlishly dangled at arm's length from his neck.

He tipped the bottle and drank deeply. Then he held the bottle out to her. She hesitated, before letting go of his neck to accept the bottle. "I'd do anything," she thought with utter abandon, drinking deeply.

* * * * *

"Yes, sir, Mr. President. Yes, sir. What seems to be the trouble?"

The man who had just entered the President's bathroom wore a freshly pressed black suit. His nose had been bent over a trifle at some time or other and had remained that way. His gimlet eyes jerked here and there about the Presidential bathroom as if hoping to ferret out some foreign spy trying to discover what brand of tooth paste the President might be using.

"Come over here, Jerry," the President said. He was standing in front of the wash basin with a glass in his right hand. The short figure of the F.B.I. man obeyed in three slightly abrupt steps.

Leisurely the President ran the cold water faucet and filled the glass, handing it to Jerry.

"What is that?" the President asked.

"Water, of course," Jerry smirked.

"Is it?" the President asked quietly.

JERRY looked from the President's face to the water glass, and sniffed cautiously. He put the glass to his lips and let some of the liquid trickle into his mouth. His black eyebrows lifted in surprise. When he took the glass away his right cheek twitched.

"I would say it is a very good brand of rye whisky, sir," he said cautiously. "But I saw you take it from the cold water tap!"

"That's right," the President nodded grimly. He reached out and turned the faucet on full. The forceful stream cascaded into the basin and drained rapidly.

Jerry reached desperately to shut off the faucet. The President grinned and shut it off first.

"Rye whisky," the President said. "Nothing but rye whiskey. It's in the hot water system too. I nearly took a shower in it. There must be hundreds of gallons of it. At first there was just a faint smell, but now it's the pure stuff."

"But how?" Jerry asked, the cheek muscles twitching again nervously. "And why?" He looked at the glass in his hand.

"Go ahead," the President said.

"Thank you, Mr. President," Jerry said gratefully. He downed the entire glassful.

"I think I can tell you how," the President said slowly. "Obviously someone has pumped whisky in the water main at some point along the line from here to the water storage system. It could be done easily by having more pressure on the tank of whisky than exists in the water main. Any amount of whisky could be introduced into the system that way, and it would merely cause the water in the main to back up into the tanks it came from."

"But why?" Jerry asked. He looked longingly at the cold water tap and at his empty glass, put an impersonal, scientific look on his face, and filled the glass again.

Abruptly the President hiccoughed. Jerry looked ludicrously surprised. The President laughed at the expression on Jerry's face. Jerry laughed with the President. His laugh was a restrained, intermittent titter.

"Hot and cold running rye whisky," the President said for no reason. Jerry, emboldened by the President's jovial mood, drank his second glass. Then he politely rinsed the glass and filled it again, giving it to the President.

"Thish ish a sherious matter," he said earnestly while the President twirled the glass slowly, examining its amber depths. Jerry's cheeks gave another twitch.

Jerry left the bathrom and went to the Presidential bedside and used the Presidential phone. He had some difficulty dialing the right number. He found it impossible to convince his superiors that the Presidential water system was full of rye whisky. The President himself had difficulty in convincing them.

In less than half an hour the White House was the center of a veritable beehive of ac-

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tivity. More than one person found it so hard to believe the water system was full of unadulterated high quality whisky that they had to reassure themselves every so often of the fact.

Congressmen at their breakfast tables were greeted with the headlines, PINK ELEPHANTS IN THE WHITE HOUSE?, written by an enterprising reporter from the simple fact that there was some whisky in the White House water pipes. In three paragraphs this reporter started with flying saucers, switched to the pink rabbit scare, and pointed out that whisky in the White House plumbing was the logical next step and should have been anticipated by the F.B.I.

A Congressional investigation was begun immediately by a quorum of volunteers who didn't bother to lay out an organizational plan, leaving that until later. Many hastened to the scene with their breakfasts half eaten.

And while the Governmental investigation of the evidence was going on, a host of lesser officials and F.B.I. men were trying to shear through red tape and trace the water main back along its route, and find out where the whisky had been introduced. . . .

ONE of Miss Henrietta Smythe's more outstanding virtues was the unvarying routine of her normal day. With the novelty of love wearing off and the conviction that Gabby was hooked by her charms, this routine began to come back. Part of it was listening to the ten o'clock morning news over the radio.

She turned on the radio at exactly ten.

"Good morning folksh, *hic!*" the radio said. "A turble shing ish hap—ish hapnun here atta White Housh. Thish ish Stew Beershon—I mean Dew Pearsh—shay! That'sh my name! Mountain Dew they ushed to call me in the old daysh.

"But forgive me, folksh. I'm a victim of chemical warfare. The enemy have not been shighted yet, but they have been invited to the party. *Hic!*"

The voice over the radio changed its tone to one of stewed gravity.

"Calling all pink rabbitsh. Calling all pink rabbitsh. You are ordered to come to the White Housh immediately and take an anti-Communisht oath. You are being inveshtigated.

"But, sheriously, folksh. Don't be alarmed. A deadly chemical agent hash been inter—intro—put into the plumbing syshtem at the White Houshe. It'sh rye whisky. Congresh ish inveshtigating the evidensh. There'sh shoushnsh a gallonsh. Shoushnsh."

Ahnee switched off the radio and looked at Gabby expectantly. Gabby nodded delightedly. Then, teetering unsteadily on his feet he approached Ahnee deviously and shook hands with him. "Good luck, Arny rabbit," he said. "You have been invited to the White Housh at lasht." . . .

With her arm firmly secured about Gabby's waist, Henrietta stood in the doorway waving farewell to the twenty-odd pink rabbits as they went down the front walk to the gate in the high brick wall. Gabby watched them go with tear filled eyes.

On the other side of the wall police sirens had been wailing all morning. They were shrieking now; but as the pink rabbits passed out of sight onto the sidewalk those sirens died abruptly.

A police car was only half a block away when the first of the pink rabbits emerged onto the sidewalk. The two officers in the car watched as another, another, and still others came out in single file, their ears waving idly, and walking on their hind legs like people.

Without thinking, one of the officers reported their appearance over the radio. It brought immediate response. Squad cars converged on the vicinity—to investigate the men in the squad car, not the rabbits.

But each car as it arrived at the scene confirmed that first report. Before the procession of pink rabbits had gone two blocks there were a dozen police cars on the scene. Some went ahead and drove people off the street as a matter of safety. Others drove slowly along, keeping pace with the pink rabbits, their guns ready for instant use.

The rabbits ignored them, knowing that an introduction would be necessary before speaking to any of these men who were obviously sent as an escort. At the White House they would need no introductions as they had been invited. They had heard the invitation over the radio.

News of the appearance of the pink rabbits was received at the White House at first with frank skepticism. As the reports were confirmed, however, the conviction was driven home at last that there *were* pink rabbits, that they were probably responsible for the whisky in the plumbing, and that they were marching on the White House.

The fact that there were only twenty of

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them, and that they carried no heavy artillery, was all that kept the President from declaring a state of national emergency. Instead, he and a majority of both Houses waited, listening to reports.

THE squad car escort had been given orders not to molest the rabbits in any way. And as the procession of pink rabbits turned up the walk onto the White House grounds, the President himself gave orders that they were to be admitted.

Thus it was that Ahnee and his fellow rabbits came into the presence of the President. Ahnee had learned well the customs and courtesies of humans. With grave dignity in his bearing, a puckered smile on his pink face, and slow precision, he weaved forward with complete mastery of the devious footwork of "approach," bowed low before the President, extended one pink hand, and said:

"Pleashed to meet you, Mr. Preshident."

The President smilingly took the proffered hand and shook it. When he released it Ahnee stepped back. One after another the pink rabbits advanced in the same weaving manner and shook hands with the President.

When this introduction had been completed, Ahnee stepped forward to speak:

"We are the ambashadorsh of peash shent by our own Preshident on Venush, the shecond planet of the sholar shyshtem. We regret that we did not come forward at wunsh but we felt it besht to learn your language firsht, and sho shought out a reclushe to learn it from firsht. Now we greet you in your own language and offer peashful communion between our two planetsh."

There were no fools present at that historic meeting. The horrible truth burst into every human brain in one awful instant. The pink rabbits were no fantasy. They were representatives of a race that populated a whole planet. They were not to be laughed at, or they might take offense and an interplanetary war might result. Obviously they were more advanced than the human race or they would not have been able to travel from Venus to the Earth.

The recluse they had sought out had been a drunk, living alone somewhere. Obviously he hadn't believed the pink rabbits were real. Only a sober person would have become convinced. The whole, devastating pattern was clear to everyone.

It was the President who provided the delicate touch that changed possible catastrophe into a harmless situation, and set the pattern for press releases.

"We welcome you in the name of the people of the world," he said solemnly. "It is a minor misfortune that you chose as a teacher of our customs and language a recluse who uses an idiomatic version of our spoken language, and whose mannerisms are not the universally accepted ones. That can be remedied quickly in the next few days under expert teaching. But tell me, why did you choose a recluse rather than making official contact at once?"

Ahnee looked a trifle confused.

"*Sss?,*" he said. "Shshsh?"

Then a look of comprehension dawned.

"I see," he said. "Merely a slight change of pronunshciation. Pronunciation. It will be eashy—I mean easy to correct. On Venus recluzhes are superior rabbitsh."

Miss Henrietta Smythe was, as has been said, a creature of precise habits. Promptly at twelve noon she disengaged her arms from Gabby's neck and turned on the radio. Gabby took the opportunity to take another drink.

"History is in the making today," the radio said. "The pink rabbits are not a myth or a delusion. They are real. They come from the Planet Venus as official ambassadors of peace to establish diplomatic contact between the races of Venus and we human beings of Earth—"

There had been a growing pattern of logic in the back of Gabby's mind. With this announcement over the radio it came into full bloom with startling abruptness.

For the first time in his life he jumped from being nicely mellowed into complete, stone cold soberness, in two seconds flat.

He saw Miss Henrietta Smythe advancing toward him, her iron-gray curls bobbing like spring wire coils, a possessive gleam in her faded eyes. His thoughts whispered the terrible conclusion that if Arny rabbit was real, then Miss Henrietta must be real.

With a squawk he ducked under her outstretched arms and ran to the front door. His hands fumbled in panic at the latch. Staccato footsteps came at him. As he swung the door open, two arms circled his waist and a mass of gray curls cascaded over his face from the rear. "You wouldn't want to leave poor little me, would you, Gabby?" a voice breathed in his ear.

The tenseness went out of his body. He was trapped and he knew it.

"No, Miss Henrietta," he said wearily.

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"You were in the lava cave"

# The HIEROPHANTS

*Nais witnesses a miracle on an asteroid, a miracle that is the harbinger of doom!*

IT WAS an emergency landing. The asteroid was a bubble of lava, honeycombed with passages, as light as pumice, as brittle and dry and dead as the craters of the moon. Somebody had landed on it once before; the nose of a space cruiser, thirty years out of date, projected incuriously from one of the lava caves.

"But what if the parts don't fit?" the girl asked. She was not worried—they had plenty of oxygen and food—only a little tense.

"Some things don't change," the man answered abstractedly. "As long as ships fly at all, they've got Omega power. And the axis in that hasn't changed in the last fifty years. You're sure you understand what you're to get? I'd go myself, only—" He

**By MARGARET ST. CLAIR**



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leaned with all his weight against a wrench.

"Oh, yes." The girl began hanging tools from the belt of her suit. "The main axis assemblage and the top lateral coils."

"That's it. Don't forget your torch—you may have to burn your way in. Hurry back, kid. I'll be missing you." He bent to his work.

Nais nodded. She pulled the visor of her helmet into place. Outside the *Lyra*, she switched on her suit's arti-gravs. With Earth's normal gravity tugging at her heels she walked across the curving surface of the little moon.

The name on the snout of the derelict was *Star Rover;* its owner must have had a romantic temperament. There was no provision for exterior opening of its ports. Nais, striking arcs for her torch, sighed. She could look forward to a long, slow job burning through the tough metal of the hull. Even thirty years ago metal had been pretty tough. But she had plenty of time (plenty of oxygen, plenty of food) and if her hands had the faintest possible tendency to tremble, why, it was because there was always something disturbing about a derelict.

The oblong she was burning out turned slowly red. It began to bulge from the pressure of air inside. Nais stepped hastily away. Even on the tiniest of asteroids, an asteroid like a lava bubble floating in space, mass remains mass. She had no desire to be hit by a section of beryllium hull.

The oblong of metal came out like the cork from a bottle of champagne. The edges of the aperture it left slowly cooled. When enough heat had been dissipated to make entrance possible, Nais put her hands on the sides and clambered in, her helmet light sending long shafts stabbing into the ship's dark interior.

ABRUPTLY she bit back a cry. A man in a space suit sat in the circle of white light. He was nodding at her. After a moment she smiled shakily. He was dead, of course, had been dead for thirty years. And his nodding was caused by the air's flowing past him as it went through the opening in the hull.

She went up to him and touched him on the shoulder as he sat at the desk. He floated slowly away from her, his face crumbling as he moved. Repressing a shudder, Nais looked down at what he had been writing when he died.

The earlier pages of the book were a log, a not unmoving chronicle of defective instruments and the bad fortune which had brought the *Star Rover* by imperceptible stages to the asteroid and the lava cave. He had attempted repairs. There was, he had written, no cause for anxiety—he had plenty of oxygen and food. Then there was a break in the record. A page was left blank. And then at the top of the last page he had written:

The apple tree, the singing, and the gold.

That was all. Nais caught her lower lip between her teeth. She realized incredulously that she was afraid. For a moment the emotion was so strong that her hand jerked on the suit's radio, her lips parted to call to Anseln for help. Then common sense reasserted itself.

The *Star Rover's* owner had died a natural death. (From what? He had written, "Plenty of oxygen, plenty of food." Why, from a sudden heart attack.) Isolation—the terrible isolation of the black, unanswering void, the isolation the earth-bound could never comprehend, had driven him mad before his death. He had died dreaming of the golden trees of earth. But he was dead, and she, Nais, could not afford the luxury of fear. Plenty of oxygen, plenty of food! But there was always danger, and quite apart from danger, she and Anseln were due in Aphrodition on the 17th. She had a job to do.

She turned up her helmet light. The touch of the tools hanging from her belt reassured her. She found the Omega power unit and got down beside it on her knees. The cover had to come off first, and then there was the complicated job of freeing the main axis assemblage. Most of the bolts were stiff.

Gradually Nais became absorbed in her task. As always when she worked with a ship's Omega, the marvelous simplicity of the thing's heart soothed and delighted her. Everything was in good shape. It was a pleasure to handle it. Once when a tendril of her hair caught on her helmet—it must have been a tendril of hair—and sent a sharp pain through the base of her skull, she ignored it. She was almost done with the main axis assemblage now.

She lifted it out, set it carefully on the deck. She began on the top lateral coils. The coils were strong enough, but exceedingly brittle; one had to use great care in

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handling them. From time to time as she worked, Nais stopped and listened. Once she shook her head for quite two seconds, to clear a noise from it.

She had got the right top coil out and was well along with the left center one when she put down her wrench. For a moment she hesitated. Then she walked slowly toward the stern exit port. Her face was as smooth, as bland, as innocent, as cream. . . .

Afterwards Nais was not quite certain how her initiation began. Was the pain at the base of her skull the beginning, or had that been really nothing but the pull of a wisp of hair? Had it begun when she heard the faint, far-off singing coming through the beryllium walls of the ship? Or had it been earlier, when she stood beside the *Star Rover's* owner and felt the awful twinge of fear? But she had left the *Star Rover's* stern exit and walked out mindlessly into the black.

The asteroid was a bubble of lava, honeycombed with tunnels like a rotten apple with worm tracks, brittle, dry and dead. There was no sense to any of it. But Nais, standing there in the darkness, so deeply meshed in abstraction that she hardly knew who Nais was, saw a golden haze come into being. She saw a miracle. She saw Eden being born.

IT WAS born very slowly. Bemused as she was, Nais yet felt that time itself had somehow thickened and become gelatinous, and that she walked forward through this resistant medium toward Eden as if she walked under water through a heavy sea. The uncreated paradise was on the other side of a barrier of hours; and minutes came between the pulsations of her heart.

The tranced, hypnotic calm she had worn at first was deserting her. There were moments, in this slow and tremendous birth from blackness, when blackness seemed to spread over the new earth. Eden hovered tremulously between being and not-being. And Nais strained toward it through glassy gulfs of time, sick with longing and anxiety.

It came at last, soundlessly, like a great thunderclap of light. Eden delivered, Eden triumphant, Eden reborn. There was a brook at Nais' feet that flowed in a bed paved with emerald grass and tiny flowers. Kneeling, she pulled her helmet's visor up and stripped off her gloves. She scooped up the water in her hand to drink—she knew with a conviction as strong as instinct that she must drink of it.

It was very cold and burned her hand almost like fire. For an instant she watched its odd, half-alive sparkle in her hand. Then she set her lips to it and drank. She stepped across the brook.

She stood now in a meadow where there were no shadows, where everything seemed to burn in a faint radiance of living gold. The grass under her feet was starred with flowers whose colors were gently luminous. The arch of heaven was a deep, lovely apple-green, and the wind that blew across her cheek and ruffled the hair within her helmet seemed to trail with it light lambent corpuscles of gold.

Ahead of her were the trees. The faint, aureate haze was thicker about them and wound in delicate tendrils around their trunks. They lifted their branches above it in ardor, in challenge, in triumphant life. The leaves that clothed them were flame made gem-like and frozen into the shape of a leaf, ecstasy made green and visible. In the midst of the trees was one tree taller than the others, and this tree, and this tree only, bore fruit.

Nais licked her lips. Desire had dried them and made them parched. She began to run toward the trees as fast as she could, stumbling in her space suit and hating, as she ran, her body for its clumsy humanity. Yet here in Eden even desire and pursuit became richness, almost joy.

The trees were a long way off. Nais had to stop more than once to rest, and these halts increased her feverish impatience. She wanted to run until her heart burst or until she got to the trees. She had forgotten—from the instant the chilling water of the brook touched her lips she had forgotten—Anseln, the ship, everything. There was in her mind awareness of nothing save the supernal Eden in which she stood.

The voices that had been in her ears since—she could not remember—since before, grew louder. She was almost at the edge of the marvelous grove. But even in her wild haste she had realized that the ground over which she ran was not like the soil of Earth—a base, gross element—but ethereal, glorious, mixed with light. And now, almost under the branches of the trees, she halted, knowing that the ground before her was holy, was literally holy ground.

She might be sick with longing, her whole

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being turned toward the trees as urgently as the compass needle turns to the north, yet she could not, she dared not, go further. She must have a guide. There must be someone to reveal the mysteries to her, a hierophant.

In the J. J. Rikstoff Museum in Aphrodition there is a bas-relief which critics have called the finest work of art ever executed by a humanoid race. It comes from a temple which the Sanders Expedition excavated twenty or thirty years ago, and it enjoys, in a quiet way, a considerable fame. It represents a man and woman in the scanty, handsome costume of Old Venus standing before a blossoming tree. From one of the branches someone—something (whatever that radiant shape is, it is certainly not human) is handing them a barely ripened fruit.

A DARING archeologist has hazarded the guess that the sculpture represents the supreme moment in the long-lasting mystery cult which contented Venusian minds and hearts for so many centuries, but this hypothesis has met with little approval from the academic world. No one has ever conjectured what the dart-shaped object at the lower left of the relief may be. At any rate, there the stone slab stands, whatever it may mean, and people come from all over the system to look at it. Nais might have remembered that stone, had she been capable of remembering anything.

She waited under the trees. And though waiting was painful, she bore it patiently. Overlying her eagerness was the knowledge that waiting was a part of Eden's law, not to be rebelled against. The golden singing within her brain was growing stronger. She must wait.

The aureate haze about the trees began to thicken, to glow more brightly. In its center was what was like a cocoon of ardent, ever more burning filaments. Nais watched, tremulous with expectancy.

The choiring voices soared up and up. The chrysalis of light split soared up and up. Was it one chrysalis or a hundred? There was a dazzle among the trees.

Nais' hands went up in homage. Out of the valves of light had stepped . . . one cannot describe the indescribable. Philologists tell us that the word "angel" meant nothing more originally than messenger.

"Do you come with clean hands?" the voice of the hierophant said within her brain.

"My hands are clean," Nais answered humbly.

"Are you pure in heart?"

"My heart is pure."

"What do you most desire?"

"To taste of the fruit."

"Enter, then," the hierophant said. "Enter and taste."

Nais stepped forward. Her heart was like a bell ringing joy, joy, joy, within her breast. As her feet touched the ambrosial soil of the grove she felt a surge of joy through all her limbs. In all her life she had never been alive until now. Glory, glory, glory, glory and joy, sang her heart.

At the foot of the tree the hierophant was waiting for her. Gravely he reached up and plucked from the bough one of the glowing globes. He gave it into Nais' hand. She raised to her lips the divine fruit. . . .

* * * * *

"Are you all right, darling?" Anseln begged. "Nais, say you're all right!"

Nais looked at him remotely. She had been plucked back so abruptly from Eden's deathless world, plucked back through such cold gulfs of distance and time, that she felt herself permeated with a mortal difference. The cabin of the *Lyra*, the whole world of humanity, seemed dim, wasted and unreal. Perhaps it always would.

Anseln was chafing her hand. "You're all right, honey, aren't you? Nais, I can't stand it if—if I was too late."

With a great effort Nais lifted one hand and placed it on her husband's head. His tense face relaxed a little.

"Baby," he said almost brokenly. "What would I have done if I'd been too late? You were standing there in the lava cave with that white thing coiled all around you, burning you, sucking the life from you. I had to drive it off with my stun gun. It was a horror. It didn't want to leave. Nais, how could I let you go into such danger? I'll never forgive myself."

"I'm all right," Nais said. She spoke through lips that hardly seemed to be her own.

"You—you've got to be," Anseln said. "I'm going to hurry with the repairs and get the ship away from here just as fast as I can. Get you to doctors, a hospital. And then I'm coming back here and blast that white thing, that devil, into Hell."

"No!" Nais said.

When he, after many anxious inquiries,

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had gone back to his work on the main axis assemblage, Nais half-turned on her side so that she lay looking up at the wall. Her thoughts came slowly, and they were long, icy thoughts.

THERE had been Eden, and a divine grove, and a hierophant. She had thought she stood in Eden; Anseln had seen her standing wrapped in a strangling coil of fire. Who had been right? "The apple tree, the singing, and the gold," the Star Rover's owner had written; he too had seen.

There had been a hierophant. Nais' mind went back to the bas-relief in the Rikstoff museum. With a stab of conviction she understood.

Once, millennia upon millennia ago, the asteroid had been a holy place. It had been a place of pilgrimage for the Old Venusians. They had gone there in their ships to be initiated, to penetrate the mysteries, to taste of the divine fruit. Men and women and children, they had seen what Nais had seen.

The race had begun to die out. Fewer and fewer ships had visited the holy place. At last they had stopped going altogether and only the hierophants, long-lived, perhaps immortal creatures of pure energy, had remained. And when Terrestrials, who were like the Old Venusians in so many ways, had landed on the asteroid, the hierophants had remained true to their old function. They had recreated for them the miraculous Eden to which they held the key. They had initiated them.

But human minds and bodies were not like those of Old Venus: that race had been not human, but humanoid. What had spelled sweet consummation for it, an experience which had been the crown of life, could be nothing for a Terrestrial but death. To taste the fruit of the tree was to die of it, as the owner of the *Star Rover* had died. Anseln, by appearing when he had, had saved her life.

He had saved her life. She could go back to Terra now, back to sunny days and laughter and human delights. There was a lifetime to share with Anseln, a home to build, children to give birth to and rear. She would live a long rich human life. And always, whatever happened to her, she would feel empty and cheated. There would always be a corrosive bitterness, an unsatisfied longing, at the core of her. Some part of her would be standing, eternally, with hands outstretched in longing toward the divine tree.

"Almost finished with the repairs!" Anseln called cheerfully from where he was at work. He walked over to where she lay and stood looking solicitously down at her. "Feeling better now, dear?" he asked.

Nais nodded. Dutifully she raised her face for his caress. And as he bent to kiss her, she lowered her eyelids hastily to hide the emptiness in her eyes.

**Barred from space, Rod Cantrell suddenly gets an unlooked-for opportunity to fight the marauders who threaten the existence of all cosmic life in THE BLACK GALAXY, a complete novel by Murray Leinster featured in the March issue of—**

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an Orig Prem novelet

by BENJ. MILLER

# ON THE

## CHAPTER I

### *A New Job for Stieve*

STIEVE ANDRO, ace time-traveling reporter for *Solar News*, argued stubbornly. "But look, Mister. Miss Huipl can't go back to Chichen Itza in Six Hundred and Sixty-Eight Anno Domini. If she does, she'll be sacrificed by the priests. If she goes back later she won't find her people at all—and anyway, she hasn't any people. Don't you see?" he pleaded. "You can't send her back to a deal like that."

The man in the gray uniform, with "U. S. Temporal Immigration Service" on his sleeve, shook his head.

"Sorry. Our records show that she came from the Mayan nation in Six Hundred and



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*A strange mixture of Mayan intrigue and Egyptian romance provides a combination in time travel that's curious and rare!*

Cleopatra was wearing a filmy red negligee. She was all woman

# HOUSE

Sixty-Eight Anno Domini, without even a visa."

"I had to bring her, to save her life."

"Nevertheless, we have been lenient so far, but I must insist upon her leaving Twenty-two thirty-two by midnight, or we shall deport her."

"What are we going to do?" Stieve asked helplessly.

"There are a number of things you can do. Miss Huipl, for instance, might become a citizen by marrying a citizen." He watched Stieve keenly.

Stieve Andro's face instantly turned red.



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"Oh, no, not me. I'm a bachelor."

"That," the man pointed out, "is the ideal status."

"What else can happen?" Stieve asked hoarsely. He would do almost anything to save Miss Huipl from Six sixty-eight.

"If she could be certified as having a particular skill needed by our culture—"

"Who can certify that?" Stieve asked eagerly.

"Any responsible citizen, say one of the higher officials of *Solar News*. But it has to be legitimate," he warned.

Stieve considered. "She has no particular skill aside from the way she swings—hey, how come Davie Horsemeat from Eighteen Thousand Bee See is still here? He's been playing on Broadway for three weeks. And I understood Chief Cook-and-Bottle-Washer's daughter—what's her name? Madame Du Barry from Fourteen Ninety-two—has had a screen test and signed a five-year contract in Hollywood."

"Acting ability," said the man, "satisfies the regulations."

Stieve brightened. "That's it, then. I'll have them give Huipl a screen test. That will fix everything! She'll pass with an A-plus, too. She's cuter'n a little red wagon. She'll look like a million in tri-dimensionals. Thanks, Mister. Thanks." He rushed out.

He took the fast walk to his office. He was elated. Somehow, Miss Huipl had gotten under his skin. She was too young for him—he felt like a father to her—well, almost like a father. At any rate, he could not endure the thought of sending her back to choose between the sacrificial altar and the skunks. His job on the morning telepaper wasn't worth that. If it ever should come to that, he'd go back with her.

He got off at his suite, where the frosted sign over the door said:

THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEATURE
by
STIEVE ANDRO

That sign didn't mean much any more, the way he'd been jumping recently, first to Columbus' landing in 1492, then to 18,000 B. C. to timecast the invention of the wheel, and finally to Chichen Itza in 668 A. D. to report the mysterious migration of the Mayas. It was this last trip that had resulted in the presence of the delicious Miss Huipl Matapa in the year 2232, which seemed to be causing the immigration service a certain amount of pain.

WITHOUT hesitating Steive stalked in. He went to his inner office. "Well," he said to his assistant, Orig Prem, "I've got the answer."

The little robot was standing straight to his full height of four feet and three inches. "Yes, sir?" he said.

Stieve held up a hand to shade his eyes. "Move over just a trifle. You must have polished your face this morning. I can't see you very well. The light reflects so much—"

Orig Prem moved a step. "Please don't keep me in suspense, sir," he said with dignity. His steel-wire eyebrows seemed to twist a little.

Stieve looked at him. "You're definitely in anxiety, but rest your mind. Get me a Hollywood agent on the phone. Get one here in New York. We'll sell Miss Huipl to the movies, and then she can stay."

The anxiety began to fade from the robot's steel-plated face. Finally he smiled as he picked up the phone. "You make me very happy, sir."

Stieve took the morning telepaper and turned to the inside. A moment later he said, "Murphy's 'One Thousand Years Ago Today' column is getting very bad."

"Yes, sir," agreed Prem. He asked the operator for a number. "Did you see on the front page that James Warren Merriman-Hat is back from Europe?"

"Who's all that?"

Prem stuck the telephone to his magnetized ear and took the paper from Stieve. He opened it to the front page. "There. That tells it. Vice president of *Solar News.*"

"So what? Solar has over a hundred vice presidents."

"Not like this one," said Prem. "Mr. Merriman-Hat is the first vice president. Also he has a very poor digestion and he loathes the Time Travel Section." Prem stared at the ceiling. "I was very happy while he was in Europe."

"Well, rest your relays. He won't bother us."

"Have you forgotten that he almost closed up the Time Travel Section two or three times?"

"He can't do that," said Stieve. "The telepaper would fold up."

"Then you haven't noticed the bulletin that just went up?"

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Stieve stared at him. He didn't like the soberness in Prem's voice. Also, it struck him that Prem hadn't shown due joyfulness over the news about Miss Huipl. "What?"

"A meeting of directors for tomorrow morning, to consider important questions relating to the morning telepaper. Hello, is this Davie Horsemeat's agent? We want you to screen test a young lady for us. Can you do it this morning? Miss Huipl Matapa. She's working in the restaurant over here at *Solar News*. Will you push it through today? Yes, urgent! Thanks."

Prem was beaming again. "He'll give us a report today, Mr. Andro. Sometime this afternoon."

"Good. Now—" The telephone tinkled, and Stieve answered. "Okay. Right away." Stieve tossed the telepaper into the disintibasket and got up. "That was Smullen. I think he's got a new assignment dreamed up for us."

Prem crossed two of his articulated fingers. "I will do my very best hoping, sir."

Stieve found Smullen, managing editor, in heavy mood. "It's a complicated deal," said Smullen. "No doubt you saw that Mr. Merriman-Hat has returned from Europe."

"Yes," said Stieve reluctantly, watching the light reflect from Smullen's bald head.

"You probably know that Mr. Merriman-Hat is a very weighty officer of *Solar News*. He's never cared much for time-travel, and that is particularly true on days when his indigestion is bad. Also he has never cared for American cooking, so you see what that means. When he is here, it's a constant struggle to keep him from chopping off the Time Travel Section."

"That would not be good policy," Stieve said.

"That is my opinion—but there is no argument against indigestion, Stieve."

"Say," Stieve leaned forward. "Is he the one who put the heat under the Immigration Service to send Miss Huipl back to Six sixty-eight?"

Smullen nodded. "And he's planning to ask the directors to cut our appropriation in half tomorrow morning."

UPON hearing this news, Stieve's eyes popped wide open. "He can't do that! Doesn't he realize that you are the one who originated time-travel features?"

"Well—" Smullen didn't look at Stieve. He drew the assignment book to him and opened it, and Stieve braced himself. "You know Venus never has been a subscriber to the telepaper. We've sent them samples from time to time but Contacts never has been able to sell them the service. It would mean maybe half a billion a year to *Solar News*, and possibly expansion for the Time Travel Section, because in this day when conflicts are pretty much under control, our time-travel stories account for about ninety percent of the telepaper. So if we could sign up Venus, Merriman-Hat would be forced to keep still."

"Yes," said Stieve.

"Now, the Venusians of course are pretty well advanced culturally. They have some sense of humor, but we've never been able to touch it properly. So Schedules has it all figured out that our best bet is to appeal to their amative instinct, which is quite strong." Smullen paused.

"Go ahead," said Stieve. "I'm braced."

"Oh, no. This is easy," Smullen assured him. "You will go back to ancient Egypt and timecast a love scene between Mark Antony and Cleopatra." He looked up, beaming as if he was being very indulgent. "That is what I call a choice assignment."

Stieve got up. "Not bad, I admitted, "on its face. When?"

"Oh, say this afternoon."

"Okay," said Stieve. He got up. "I'll get Prem started right away."

Smullen allowed himself a wan smile. "With Prem back in Egypt two thousand years ago, I'm sure things will get started. I understand Prem is quite an organizer."

"Well," said Stieve, "he does have intiative—which is something you don't get from an android."

## CHAPTER II

### *Huipl Serves Hot Dogs*

LEAVING Smullen, Stieve decided to go down to the restaurant on the fortieth floor. He went into the high-ceiled, softly lighted, fern-banked Venus Room. He wanted to think. But he got a surprise. The usually dreamy Venus Room was buzzing.

At one corner was a solid crowd. Stieve went up, wondering. He met Medlock, who

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was carrying a hot dog half-wrapped in a paper napkin. Medlock took a bite and grinned. "Pretty good," he said. "Just like what you read about Coney Island back in the twentieth century. Quite a stunt, eh?" Stieve grunted and moved up. When he found an opening to see what was going on, he was astonished. They had set up a booth and Miss Huipl Matapa was selling hot dogs, but certainly the deliciousness of the food was not the main attraction. Miss Huipl had somewhere managed to get another yellow sweater and another pair of red shorts, and she certainly showed up to distinct advantage.

Stieve laid down a dollar bill. "Two," he said.

Huipl, standing under the light in the little booth, apparently didn't see him very plainly. She turned around and split two buns and laid hot dogs between the halves while Stieve watched her. Then she turned back. Huipl had a very cute build.

She had a new coiffure, too. Her glossy black hair was pulled back on each side to an old-fashioned knot on her brown neck.

"May I have catsup?" Stieve asked, "or hasn't it been invented yet?"

Huipl stared at him for an instant and then clapped her hands. "Stievie!" And to everybody's astonishment, she leaned over the counter and kissed him soundly on the lips.

When Stieve could stand without hanging onto the counter, he tried out his voice. "My," he said, "you've learned some very useful things since you left the Mayas."

She smiled. Her lips were very red. Automatically Stieve wiped his lips and looked at his handkerchief. It was honest red. It hadn't come off.

"Oh, Stievie, I'm so very glad to see you. Did Mr. Murphy give you my message?"

"Mr. Murphy," said Stieve, "isn't too reliable to carry messages of that sort to me from a girl like you. How long have you been down here?"

"Three days," she said. "I asked the manager of the Venus Room why not put a stand in here to sell hot dogs, and he looked at me very carefully and said, 'Why not—if you'll sell them?' And so here I am—and I'm glad to see you, Stievie. And you may have catsup and mustard too."

They both smiled as they remembered how, back in Six sixty-eight A. D. at Chichen Itza, she had refused to let him have the catsup, because catsup had not been invented in America.

Stieve looked at the sign while Huipl waited on other customers. "The price has gone up since Six sixty-eight," he observed.

"Oh, yes, sir," she said, spearing a dog from the steamkettle. "They're fifty cents now. You pay for the surroundings," she said brightly.

"Wow!" said Stieve, sputtering on his first bite, "You must have all the pepper in Mexico in this stuff."

"Oh, no, it's a secret recipe."

"Handed down from your Mayan ancestors?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Andro. I made it up yesterday. They brought me lots of spices and things, and I didn't know what they were, but I couldn't let them know that, could I? so," she said brightly, "I used a tablespoonful of everything. Like it?"

HIS mouth wide open, Stieve was breathing softly to cool his throat. "Lovely," he said. "Like swallowing a live volcano."

But he stayed for half an hour, waiting to speak to her alone. There was something he had to be sure about. He had eaten eleven hot dogs by the time the morning rush was over. "But the last two are on the house," Huipl said confidentially.

"Look." Stieve bravely took a bite out of his twelfth. "Would you like to go back to Chichen Itza?"

She shook her head vigorously. "No, no. Please, I don't ever want to go back."

"Don't you miss your friends?"

"I didn't have any friends," she said soberly. "I was raised by the head priest. It wasn't fun—books, study, exercise—never any fun, and never a chance to talk to anyone but the head priest." She looked at him and asked earnestly, "You not going to make me go back, are you?"

Stieve swallowed hastily, and in spite of himself another bite of the twelfth went down. "No," he blurted.

A glad light filled her eyes. "I very happy," she said. "And you know what?"

"No. What?" he asked, thankfully stuffing the last bite into his mouth.

"I am very happy about my new relish that I invented for hot dogs. That is what makes them so good."

"Very good," Stieve mumbled, repressing a medium-size burp. "Very good."

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"Do you really like them?" She was beaming.

"I really do," said Stieve.

"Then I make you another one," she declared, and grabbed the spear.

"Oh, no. I wouldn't think of it," Stieve said hastily.

"Oh, yes." She split open a long bun. "This one on the house," she said brightly, dousing the dog with a tablespoon of relish. "No one but Huipl knows what goes into relish—so Huipl sure of a job."

"It's good," said Stieve, "but it's also potent." He was thinking of Mr. Merriman-Hat and his indigestion. He'd probably have a fatal attack if he should ever eat one of Huipl's hot dogs.

"There is your hot dog. Huipl make it with her own hands."

Stieve nodded. "I'll see you later." He left before she could think of making him another one on the house.

He found Prem in the office. "I have done something for Miss Huipl that you will never do," he announced.

Prem looked sorrowful. "What is that, sir?"

"I ate thirteen hot dogs." Stieve chuckled. Orig Prem couldn't eat. "Now, then," said Stieve, "you hike back to Thirty Bee See and get things arranged. We're going to do a timecast on Antony and Cleopatra."

Prem's motor purred. "Hm," he said.

"Do your stuff," said Stieve jubilantly. "We'll bring Venus into the fold and maybe we'll both get raises."

Prem's pyrex eyes were shining with anticipation. "Yes, sir. I will organize things to fullest advantage, sir. I have not forgotten my built-in principle, sir: 'A helpful robot is a happy robot'."

Stieve had a momentary qualm at Prem's use of the word 'organize,' for it was well known that Prem was an organizer with imaginative intiative, but Stieve felt too good right now to even caution the robot.

"Go back in time about a month before the timecast and see that everything goes smoothly. This has to be good."

"Okay, sir." Prem's metallic arm went up. The articulated fingers were straight in a salute. "I'll be seeing you on the Nile, sir."

Stieve was not hungry at lunchtime. He went to the library and did a little research—which was unusual. He customarily relied on Prem's vast fund of built-in information.

At sixty-two o'clock, decimal time, he went into Transition and told Medlock he was ready. Medlock connected the time-capsule," he explained. "You can put a horse and wagon in this one."

Stieve got in. "You look pretty serious." Medlock looked puzzled. "What—"

He was interrupted by the omnicall. "Mr. Andro, will you answer the phone, please?"

Stieve was already seated in the capsule, and Medlock brought him the phone. Stieve answered.

"This is Harriet Rose, the agent your Mr. Prem engaged to screen test Miss Huipl Matapa."

Stieve could feel his pulse pounding in his left wrist. "Yes?" he said.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Andro. I've just seen the first slides on Miss Matapa, and I'm sorry to say her skin is definitely unphotogenic."

Stieve was stunned. He said dully, "You mean you can't use her?"

"I'm afraid that's it. I wish it could be different, Mr. Andro."

Stieve sat back limply. The phone was loose in his hand. Medlock started to take it, but Stieve straightened up and pulled it back. "Get me Smullen," he said. "Somebody's got to do something about this before I get back. Midnight is the deadline. Get me Smullen."

Medlock was staring at Stieve as if he didn't know what to make of it. Finally he spoke: "You won't get Smullen for a while, Stieve. I saw him just a moment ago. He was leading Mr. Merriman-Hat up to the hot dog stand in the Venus Room— Hey, what's the matter with you? You look as if you'd just seen Davie Horsemeat riding a sabertooth tiger into Smullen's office."

"Please," Stieve pleaded, "throw the switch." He pulled the lid down over his head.

THE capsule was dark inside. It seemed to spin, down and down and down, and then drop into bottomless black space. It bumped, and stopped. With a sigh Stieve pushed up the lid. He climbed out and stepped down.

The sun was in his eyes. He squinted. At first he thought an enormous Egyptian king was bending over him, with a head so big it filled the sky. Then he got his eyes adjusted and realized he was looking into the face of the Sphinx. It was late after-

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noon and the sun was setting behind the Sphinx. Stieve took a tentative step toward the east.

Then he heard a raucous voice: "Extry! Extry! Pa-puh!"

He saw the barefooted, black-skinned newsboy running in the sand with an armful of papers. Obviously, Stieve thought dryly, Orig Prem's organization ability had been functioning at its usual tempo.

"Here, boy. How about a paper?" said Stieve.

"Yes, suh. Late afternoon edition, suh." He whipped out a copy. "Ten cents, suh." Stieve gave him a quarter. "Keep it."

"Yes, suh!"

Stieve read the heading: *The Gizeh Courier*. He noted the headline:

OCTAVIAN PURSUES FLEEING ROMAN LEGIONS.
MARK ANTONY'S IMPORTED SOLDIERS REPORTED IN ROUT.

Alexandria: Fresh from his naval triumph over Mark Antony's fleet near Alexandria. Octavianus and his conquering army today pursued Antonius' disorganized forces up the west side of the Nile toward Gizeh, where Antonius is reported to be in seclusion with Cleopatra. Octavianus told press representatives today that he will "take Antonius back to Rome in chains." Antonius did not answer telephone calls, and spokemen at the royal palace, questioned on the whereabouts of Cleopatra, had nothing to say.

Stieve snorted, but he had to hand it to Prem. The little robot had trained some darn good reporters and editors in the month or so he had been in ancient Egypt. Then another paragraph caught Stieve's eye.

Military experts predicted, the paper stated further, that advance guards of Octavianus' forces would probably enter Gizeh before midnight. Stieve considered that statement with narrowed, thoughtful eyes. Something told him that if they were to put Antony on the air, they'd better not loiter in the path of Octavian's legions.

He heard oddly shuffling, large feet and a camel drew alongside. A black-faced rider in a burnoose leaned down.

Taxi, Mister? Ibrahim's Taxi Service," he chanted through his nose. "Open twenty-four hours. Best service in Gizeh, Mister."

Stieve looked dubiously at the camel. "Funniest-smelling taxi I've ever seen," he said. He wrinkled his nose distastefully, but then he looked back at his tracks in the hot sand. "Okay," he said.

He mounted behind the camel's second hump and they started off, with the camel swaying from side to side and its legs jarring so unevenly that Stieve had to hang on with desperation.

"Mind if I smoke?" the driver asked.

"Don't pay any attention to me," said Stieve. "I'm busy."

"You can turn on the radio if you want to."

"Thanks," Stieve said dryly. "I can't turn loose that long."

"Where you going?" asked the driver in his nasal voice.

"To Gizeh," said Stieve, "and make it snappy."

"Okay, okay. Where do you wish to go in Gizeh, sir?"

"I wish to go to the river yacht of Her Majesty, Queen Cleopatra."

"Oh." The driver turned around and stared at him unabashedly. "You have business with Her Majesty, sir?"

"I'm going to timecast a love scene between her and Mark Antony," said Stieve complacently.

"Oh." The driver's eyes were wide now. His eyebrows had disappeared somewhere up under his burnoose. "Are you from Twenty-two thirty-two, sir?"

Stieve was exasperated. "Where did you think I was from, with my pale face and these store-bought clothes, standing out in the middle of the desert thumbing a ride to Gizeh?"

The answer was not entirely reassuring. "I have learned not to be astonished at anything, sir, since Mr. Prem has come to Gizeh."

## CHAPTER III

### *Mark Antony Make a Speech*

ENTERING the town, the camel at once slowed to a walk. "He a very independent camel, sir. He have a great deal of individuality. He know where to go and just how he want to go there."

"No doubt," said Stieve, "the camel gets a commission."

They went through narrow, crooked streets, with the camel apparently choosing

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its own route. There were black, scar-faced spielers in flowing robes who tried with raucous voices, to sell native bread and masses of sticky figs and fresh ripe dates.

"You want buy a souvenir from ancient Egypt, sir?" asked Ibrahim. "This our tourist section."

"Nix," said Stieve, sober with his thoughts. "And I don't want to see anybody charm snakes, and I don't want to buy a rug."

The driver turned with a sly leer. "Maybe you want see dancing girls, sir. Very special. Cheap, too. Go up this street, knock twice, and—"

"—ask for Joe," Stieve said shortly.

"Oh, sir." The driver was disappointed. "You've been in Gizeh before."

"Let's get to the river bank. These torches and horns are driving me batty."

The driver went fully half a block in silence. Then he turned. "Queen Cleopatra very good lovemaker. I watch the rehearsals. But Mark Antony old and pretty fat. He not much lover, I think me."

"Hey! You watched the rehearsals?"

"Sure. Dollar and a half a seat, plus tax."

"What's the tax for?"

The man was puzzled. "I don't know, sir. Mr. Prem said there had to be tax. He said no civilization complete without tax."

"You know Mr. Prem pretty well?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Very well."

They had left the bazaars. Now Ibrahim plowed the camel to a stop. "Here we are, sir."

Stieve got down. "How much?" he asked.

Ibrahim consulted a pedometer hanging on the camel's neck. "Let's see, sir. I would say you have run up a bill of four dollars and thirty cents, sir."

Stieve dug out a five.

"Do you wish change, sir?"

Stieve eyed Ibrahim. "Did Mr. Prem teach you that?"

Ibrahim's eyes widened. "Mr. Prem very instructive, sir."

"That's what Miss Huipl said, seven hundred years from now."

"Sir?"

"Good-by," said Stieve positively. "Perhaps we shall meet again under more formal circumstances."

IBRAHIM and the camel rattled off. Stieve saw a neon sign that said, "Studio. Admission $1.50 plus tax. Bank Night Every Wednesday. Name Miss Mystery and receive two camels, one prayer rug, nine incense burners, one fishing-boat, one acre of river-bottom land complete with lotus blossoms and crocodiles, and one rebuilt vacuum cleaner. Also dishes given to the ladies on Monday night."

Stieve snorted. Yes, Prem had been organizing all right. A small black boy stopped him. "Opera glasses, sir. You won't be able to see the kisses without glasses, sir."

Stieve dropped him a quarter and went down the aisle. At the front he found the timecast booth, with Orig Prem, shining and eager, bustling and bustling and bustling.

"Good evening, sir," said Prem. "You're just in time, sir. How is Miss Huipl?"

"Fine," said Stieve. He avoided Prem's eyes. "How is the timecast coming?"

"We're going on at ten o'clock, sir."

"You know about Octavian's army?"

"Yes, sir. I hope to complete the timecast and be back at the capsule before they reach Gizeh, sir."

"If we're not," Stieve said ominously, "they'll throw us in jail or into the catacombs—and your joints will rust."

"I know it, sir, but I could not persuade Mr. Antonius to start any sooner. He has been writing his will this evening. I think he's coming now, sir."

Under the neon lights a camel stopped, and a man in maroon gabardine slacks and tan calf riding boots jumped off and strode up to the broadcasting booth.

"Mr. Antonius," said Orig Prem, "I want you to meet my boss, Mr. Andro."

Mark Antony was over fifty—considerably older than Stieve had imagined. Antony stuck out his hand. "How are yuh, pard?" His voice was booming.

Stieve suppressed a smile. Prem had been reading Westerns again. "Okay," said Stieve.

"Well, men," said Antony, "I'm ready. But we'll have to make it snappy. I don't want that bum Octavianus to stumble over me when he goes through Gizeh." I'm no stumblebum."

"Mister," said Stieve, "I am in hearty accord with you."

"I have the transmission booth set up on the yacht out in the middle of the river, sir," said Prem eagerly.

Stieve stared. "Is that Cleopatra's yacht?"

"That's the royal scow," Mark Antony boomed.

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"Will you go over in the launch, sir?" asked Prem.

Stieve stared across the brown waters of the Nile. "Do you expect me to swim? Those crocodiles out there aren't living on mosquitoes."

They went aboard the yacht. Stieve and Prem went into the transmission booth while Antony went somewhere to change. Prem warmed up the unit. Presently a green light flashed on and off. "Distribution," Prem said. He handed the microphone to Stieve. "Antony will be ready by the time you get through your announcement," Prem said, "and I think we'd better hurry." There was a slight note of anxiety in his metallic voice.

"Okay." Stieve tried to sound cheerful. It was tearing his heart out to put on the happy act in front of Prem and see him fall for it, but it was best that way. When they should get back, and Huipl should be gone, they could forget together.

Stieve spoke to the world of Twenty-two thirty two:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the nine worlds, the great Solar News Company presents this evening the first in a series of historic love scenes. For this night we have chosen one of the most famous of all time, a scene between the incomparably glamorous Celopatra, queen of Egypt, and Marcus Antonius, one of the three Roman Triumvirs. Antonius has just been defeated by Octavianus at Alexandria, and Antonius' own army is deserting him. In this hour of gall he has turned to his great love and his faithful friend, Cleopatra, and they are about to conduct their final love scene on Cleopatra's palatial yacht on the legendary Nile."

Stieve paused for breath, wondering about audience reaction:

"Amid the hoarse bellow of vicious alligators—pardon me, Mr. Prem advises me that these are not alligators—amid the hoarse bellow of vicious crocodiles—pardon me, Mr. Prem advises that crocodiles do not bellow—amid the angry splashing of crocodiles and the eeerie howling of hyenas, Marcus Antonius has come for one final tryst with his great love, Cleopatra. Ladies and gentlemen, we bring you the year Thirty, Bee See!"

Soft lights sprang up. Stieve sucked in his breath. On a snow white couch was Cleopatra, lying indolently in a nest of cushions. She was wearing a filmy red negligee that deepened her olive-colored skin and her glossy black hair. A black leopard lay before the couch.

CLEOPATRA stirred. Stieve swallowed hard. Cleopatra was all woman. The leopard yawned, and then Mark Antony strode in, dressed in a white, embroidered toga. He wore sandals instead of riding-boots, and had a wreath of laurel around his head.

"Quick change, wasn't it?" said Prem.

"Yeah," said Stieve. "I hope it was quick enough."

Cleopatra drew a little breath and looked at Antony from under half-lowered eyelids. "Is this our last night together, Antonius?"

Stieve shivered at the huskiness of her voice.

"Aye," said Antonius. "I mean yes, darling."

"He has a hard time forgetting that he is no longer admiral of the Egyptian fleet," Prem whispered.

"Octavian draws ever nearer to Gizeh, and I think I would find other portions of Egypt more to the benefit of my health."

"But you've come again to me, Antonius." Her voice was very low.

"Aye—I mean yes, I have." Antony faced her and drew himself erect as a soldier. "I am Antonius," he proclaimed in a stentorian voice, "whose fleet has been defeated, whose army even now deserts my royal standard in geometrical progression—pardon me, in ever-increasing numbers. Is then, my dear"—he favored Cleopatra with a look from lowered eyelids—"your memory of me so tender, your recollection of my caresses yet so sweet, that you would fain enfold me in your arms?"

Stieve groaned. "What is this, amateur night?"

Prem avoided Stieve's direct look. "I think, sir, Mr. Antony hopes to make an impression. I hinted slightly"—here Prem gave a discreet metallic cough—"that there might be a Broadway scout in Twenty-two thirty-two, sir."

Stieve said in a low voice, between clenched teeth, "Some day I'll unscrew your thermopile, Prem."

The warm wind from the Nile stirred the rustling silk streamers over Cleopatra's head. "Antonius," she said softly, raising her eyes for a moment, "do you remember the nights

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that we have strolled upon this very beach?"

"Aye. I mean yes, your majesty. Pardon me. I mean yes, darling. I well recall the time when I stumbled over that fifth-columnist crocodile. Oh, pardon me, we don't have that expression yet." He raised his toga to show a jagged scar on the calf of his leg. "There is a part of me, my dear, that will be Egyptian till the end of time."

Stieve said sarcastically to Prem, "That gag was old in Eighteen-eighty."

"Yes, sir," Prem said righteously, "but they haven't heard it in these ancient times."

"I'm not too sure of that," muttered Stieve.

"Sit down, Antonius," throbbed Cleopatra's husky voice.

Antony glared at the leopard and seated himself on the step before the couch, with his head back. Her hand touched his neck and crept over his shoulder. Stieve heard Prem draw in his breath. Antony relaxed. "Will you love no one but me?" he asked.

"Antonius," she said, "I held the noble Caesar in my arms. But he was an amateur compared to you."

Antony blushed dutifully. Then he swept to his feet, and with a great flourish of his robes took a pose. "To be or not to be, that is the question, whether 'tis—"

Stieve hissed at him. "Cut it out. That isn't from *Julius Caesar*. That's from *Hamlet*." Stieve glared at Orig Prem. "Where'd he get that phony Shakespearean accent anyway? Shakespeare hasn't been born for fifteen hundred years."

Orig Prem put on his best built-in expression of innocence. "I'm afraid, sir, he read a book. He liked Shakespeare's words much better than his own, sir."

Antony glared at Stieve. He drew himself up in a haughty pose.

"A varlet has th' audacity to prompt an Antonius!" he said, scowling. He glared for a moment, and then he was thoughtful. "What cares Antonius for the facts of history?" he asked at last. "Antonius makes history from the raw fiber that is man, and having made it once, he has the pow'r to make it yet again."

Antony was grave now, as he continued and there was something of the dignity and force that must have been there when he had commanded Caesar's cavalry. "Nor does he shrink to force new facts to fit the ancient mold," he said, "for Antonius has been a man of history, and ever the tangled course of man's events must follow some one man of destiny, not the man the acts, according to the dictates of his conscience."

"Whatever is he talking about?" asked Stieve.

Prem shook his head helplessly!

"Antonius—"

He turned and looked at Cleopatra fondly. His voice was soft. "Yes, my sweet, in just a moment." His voice began to rise. "A moment of time, of your sweet time," he said absently, "and indulge an old man, my dear, in this sad hour that marks his end."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Enter, One Camel*

ANTONY paced the length of the couch. The wind was coming up. The rustling streamers over Cleopatra's head were blowing steadily from the north. Antony faced her and began to speak, slowly, sadly:

"Me thinks I hear the clank of armor, the pounding hoofs of Roman steeds, and in this hour I am reminded that history's treatment of Marcus Antonius will scarcely flatter a great man's memory. And yet I had one glorious hour, one moment from the channel of time when I did a most unselfish act. When my good friend Caesar lay riven in his coffin, and Brutus and Cassius brazenly faced a lethargic populace, then it was I, Marcus Antonius, who dared to stand before his bier and exhort punishment upon those dogs who had so stabbed away his life."

Antony's head was high, and Stieve was overwhelmed by the quiet power of the Roman's next words:

"Pardon an old man, my dear, who, deserted by his soldiers for just cause, has come to the sad end of his unhappy way. Pardon an old man who seeks, in the few brief moments allotted to his span, to re-live his one short moment of nobility."

He strode twice the length of the couch, while Cleopatra watched him from inscrutable heavy-lidded eyes. Then he stopped before her. "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

Stieve was solemn. Mark Antony was going to deliver his famous funeral oration, as no one but Mark Antony might ever do.

"I come to bury Caesar, not to praise

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him. The evil that men do lives after them, the good—"

He faltered. His voice broke. Stieve swallowed. A bell tinkled and Cleopatra gave an indolent signal. A small black boy in a green uniform and cap ran in. "Marcus Antonius?"

Mark Antony looked at the boy and annoyance came over his face, then gentleness. "Yes," he said sadly.

"I have a singing telegram for you, sir." The boy said in a singsong voice:

"Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
You better scram,
I'm coming for you."

The boy put his cap back on. "Signed, Octavianus," he said. He handed Mark Antony the yellow envelope and rushed out.

Mark Antony's hand trembled as he unfolded the sheet of paper. "Octavianus is at the gates of Gizeh," he said in a dazed voice.

The small boy dashed back in. "I forgot, sir. The message was collect."

Cleopatra waved him away lazily. "Charge it to the royal account," she said. "We're in the yellow book."

"Yes'm." The boy dashed out.

"Octavianus approaches," Mark Antony repeated as if to himself; "but he shall not take me back to Rome. I will not be a laughing stock for every disc jockey in the empire. Rather," he said soberly, "would I be crocodile-bait." Abruptly he leaned over and kissed Cleopatra. He kissed her right, and then he gently took her arms from around his neck and got to his feet.

His knees creaked a little. The black leopard turned its face to him and yawned with its great teeth close to his leg. Antony strode to a window. He turned, waved to Cleopatra, thumbed his nose at the black leopard, and jumped through. There was a splash below, then other heavy splashes, then silence. The leopard arose and yawned.

Cleopatra was putting on lipstick. "So Octavianus is coming," she murmured. "Life can be beautiful."

The lights went dim. "Great," whispered Stieve, "but not much of a love scene."

"Sh—" said Prem.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, a transcription," said a nasal voice. "Try Ibrahim's Taxi Service. Open twenty-four hours. Best service in Gizeh."

"That," said Stieve acidulously, watching Prem, "is going to cost you."

BUT Prem was speaking into the microphone. "And that, ladies and gentlemen, concludes our broadcast of one of the most historic love scenes in history. The act of Marcus Antonius in jumping overboard to feed the crocodiles is a variation from the historic fact of his suicide by falling upon a sword, because our censors will not permit a violent death to be shown in actuality."

"Hey," said Stieve, "didn't Mark Antony say Octavianus is at the gates?"

"Yes, sir," said Orig Prem.

"Then what are we waiting here for?"

"I have arranged transportation to the time-capsule, sir."

They jumped into a rowboat and got to shore. A camel came clattering along the beach, and Ibrahim's nasal voice came: "Taxi, sir."

Stieve jumped in between the humps, and Orig Prem got on behind. "Where will Octavianus be?" asked Stieve.

He thought Orig Prem's steel face looked a little pale under the torchlights, "His advance party is coming up the valley between Gizeh and the Sphinx, to cut off Mark Antony's escape."

"Antony's escape? But what about us?"

"Sir," said Ibrahim. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Thunder, no!" shouted Stieve. "I wouldn't mind even if you'd build a fire under this camel."

They could see the outline of the great head of the Sphinx against the equatorial stars when Orig Prem said to Stieve in a voice the seemed to come from dry lips:

"We are being pursued, sir."

Stieve listened. He heard the pounding of horses' hoofs. He kicked the camel in the ribs. He saw the time-capsule gleaming in the starlight. Ibrahim brought the camel to a plowing stop in the sand. Stieve started to get off, but the camel reached around and bit his leg. Stieve yelped. Prem started off. The camel grabbed his leg in its jaws.

"Hey," said Prem, "you're shorting my vasomuscular system."

"Sirs," said Ibrahim, "may I offer my humble opinion?"

"Yes," said Stieve, getting a fresh nip on the other leg, "but be quick. There are Roman soldiers a hundred yards away."

"I think my two-humped friend knows what will be his fate when the soldiers find only him and me. He wants to go up to Twenty-two thirty-two with you, sirs."

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The camel's head nodded violently and it stepped up and put one padded foot into the capsule. Stieve looked back. The soldiers were yelling now. The horses' hoofbeats thudded in the sand. He could see the gleam of their metal headpieces in the starlight. "Well, drive him in there!" Stieve roared.

He'd never know how the camel and the three of them got in, but they did, almost instantly. The lid came down and they were spinning. . . .

MEDLOCK was practically overwhelmed when he saw the party from 30 B. C. march out of the time-capsule. Stieve and Orig Prem got off the camel.

"What," asked Prem, "are we going to do with Ibrahim's Taxi Service, sir? We can't send them back today. The time-travel rules won't allow it."

Stieve groaned. "With ten thousand taxis in New York, do you suppose they'll notice one more?"

Medlock shook his head, bewildered. "Boy, what'll Smullen say when he sees this apparition coming down the hall?"

"What time is it?" asked Stieve sharply.

"Ninety-eight o'clock."

"Nearly midnight," Stieve said glumly. "Has the Immigration Service got a reservation for midnight?"

Medlock shook his head. Stieve frowned.

"Sir," said Prem, "is something wrong?"

Stieve couldn't tell him. "No."

Prem shook his head sadly. "You've been a sober man all evening. I think I know, sir. Miss Huipl was not acceptable to the movies." He added gently, "You didn't want to worry me, sir."

"No." They started out sadly, but Stieve turned back. Ibrahim was still sitting on his camel. "Mind if I smoke, sir?" Ibrahim asked.

"I wouldn't mind if you'd vaporize," Stieve said vehemently. He looked at Medlock. "Send Ibrahim's Taxi Service down to the garage. I don't know what else—hey!" He squeezed Prem's steel arm. "There's Smullen coming down the hall yonder. Head him off! Get out there and lead him away. Medlock, hide this confounded camel until we get rid of Smullen."

They met Smullen before he got half way. Stieve said quickly, "Glad to see you, sir. We were just going down to the restaurant for a bite to eat. How was the timecast?"

Smullen chuckled. "Good. Very good. I've just had word from Venus. It seems they thought it terribly funny when you got your alligators and crocodiles mixed up. They're sending a delegation to sign up for full coverage." He was smiling broadly.

"Sir," said Stieve anxiously, "isn't there anything we can do for Miss Huipl?"

"You mean the Mayan girl?"

"Yes," said both Stieve and Orig Prem.

"Oh, yes. Well, you see, Mr. Merriman-Hat invited me to lunch today. We went into the Venus Room and Mr. Merriman-Hat insisted on trying one of those hot dogs."

Stieve groaned. Then they turned a corner and Stieve sighed in relief. Ibrahim's Taxi Service for the moment was safe.

"Well," said Smullen, "would you believe it? You know about his indigestion and all? Well, he stood there and ate hot dogs for an hour. Yes, sir, he ate nineteen hot dogs, with five of them on the house."

Stieve groaned.

Smullen went on, "I was aware of Miss Huipl's difficulty, so when I saw how well he liked the hot dogs I persuaded him to certify Miss Huipl's culinary skill as a valuable contribution to our culture."

Stieve roared. He slapped Smullen on the back. Orig Prem was making a strange cackling noise that meant extreme happiness. "And did Mr. Merriman-Hat then die?" asked Stieve.

"Oh, no." They turned another corner and Stieve relaxed. Even if Ibrahim and his camel should come out into the hall now, Smullen would not hear them. "No, I met him in the hall as I left my office just now, and he said he'd never felt better in his life. He said he'd canceled the meeting tomorrow morning."

"What were you doing while Mr. Merriman-Hat was eating hot dogs?"

"Oh," said Smullen, "I was eating hot dogs too. I had twenty-three—with seven on the house."

Stieve gulped. The walk was carrying them to the elevator. Smullen got off. "See you boys tomorrow." He punched the signal-button. "By the way, you'd never guess why I came to meet you boys tonight."

"No," they said together.

Smullen chuckled. "I just got to thinking, now with all this Mayan business cleared up, what a joke on the house it would be if you boys would be crazy enough to bring back a camel with you from ancient Egypt!"

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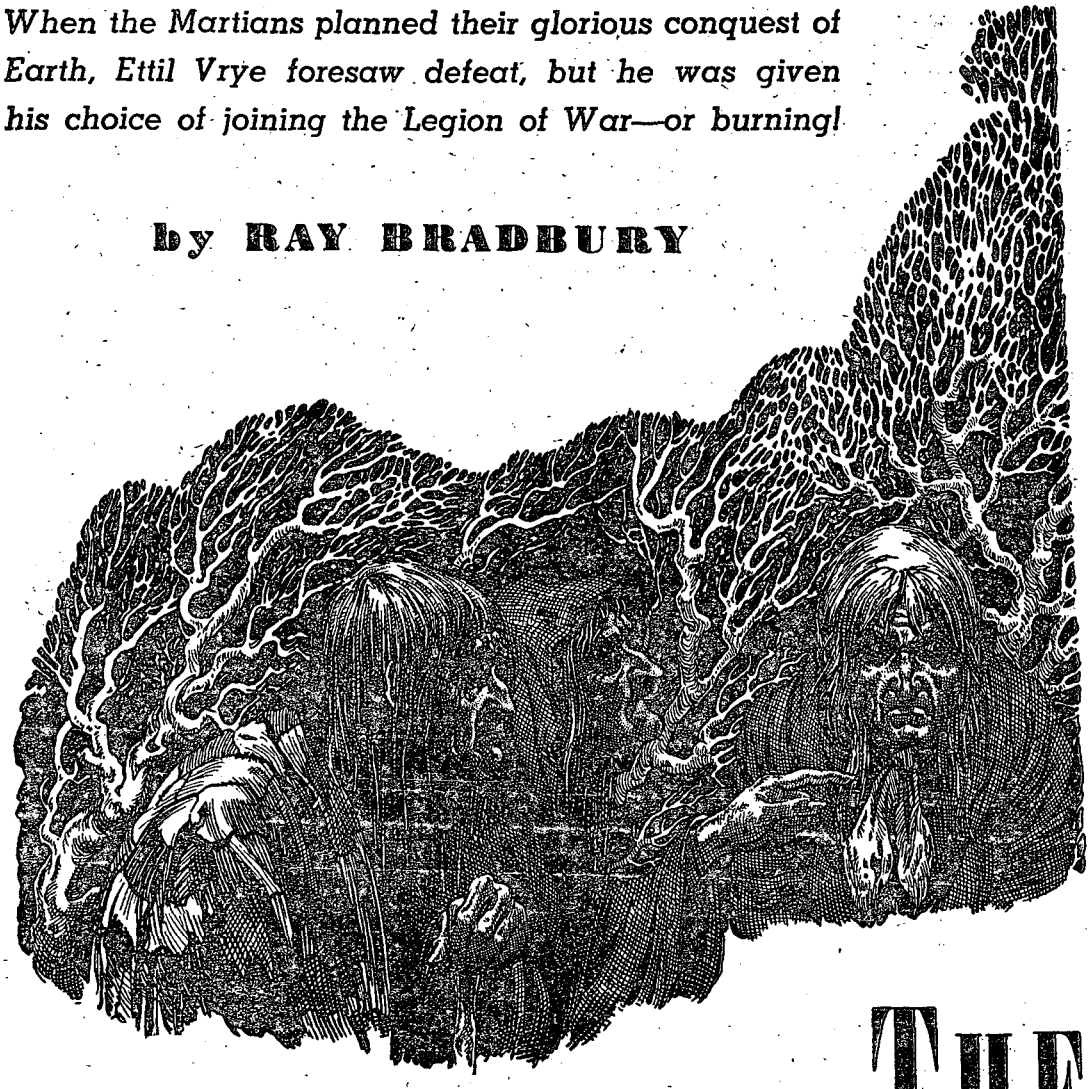
*When the Martians planned their glorious conquest of Earth, Ettil Vrye foresaw defeat, but he was given his choice of joining the Legion of War—or burning!*

by RAY BRADBURY



# THE

a novelet

HE LISTENED to the dry grass rustle of the old witches' voices beneath his open window:

"Ettil, the coward! Ettil, the refuser! Ettil, who will not wage the glorious war of Mars against Earth!"

"Speak on, witches!" he cried.

The voices dropped to a murmur like that of water in the long canals under the Martian sky.

"Ettil, the father of a son who must grow up in the shadow of this horrid knowledge!" said the old wrinkled women. They knocked their sly-eyed heads gently together. "Shame, shame!"

His wife was crying on the other side of the room. Her tears were as rain, numerous and cool on the tiles. "Oh, Ettil, how can you think this way?"

Ettil laid aside his metal book which, at



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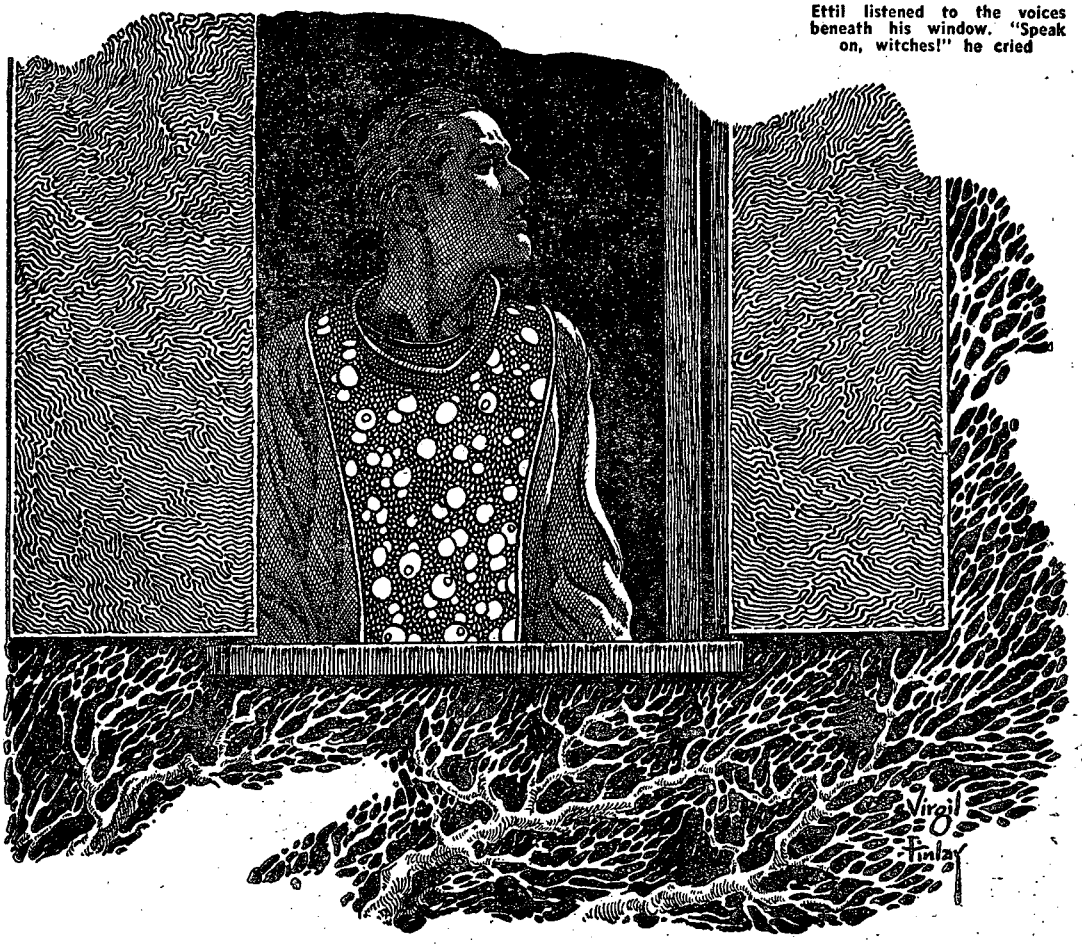


Ettil listened to the voices beneath his window. "Speak on, witches!" he cried

# CONCRETE MIXER

his beckoning, had been singing him a story all morning from its thin golden wired frame.

"I've tried to explain," he said. "This is a foolish thing, Mars invading Earth. We'll be destroyed, utterly."

Outside, a banging, crashing boom, a surge of brass, a drum, a cry, marching feet, pennants and songs. Through the stone streets the army, fire-weapons to shoulder, stamped. Children skipped after. Old women waved dirty flags.

"I shall remain on Mars and read a book," said Ettil.

A blunt knock on the door. Tylla answered. Father-in-law stormed in. "What's this I hear about my son-in-law? A traitor?"

"Yes, Father."

"You're not fighting in the Martian army?"



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"No, Father."

"Gods!". The old father turned very red. "A plague on your name! You'll be shot."

"Shoot me, then, and have it over."

"Who ever heard of a Martian *not* invading, who!"

"Nobody. It is, I admit, quite incredible."

"Incredible," husked the witch voices under the window.

"Father, can't you reason with him?" demanded Tylla.

"Reason with a dung-heap," cried Father, eyes blazing. He came and stood over Ettil, "Bands playing, a fine day, women weeping, children jumping, everything right, men marching bravely, and you sit here, oh shame!"

"Shame," sobbed the far-away voices in the hedge.

"Get the devil out of my house with your inane chatter," said Ettil, exploding. "Take your medals and your drums and run!"

He shoved Father-in-law past a screaming wife, only to have the door thrown wide at this moment, as a military detail entered.

A voice shouted, "Ettil Vrye?"

"Yes!"

"You are under arrest!"

"Good-by my dear wife; I am off to the wars with these fools!" shouted Ettil, dragged through the door by the men in bronze mesh.

"Good-by, good-by," said the town witches, fading away. . . .

THE cell was neat and clean. Without a book, Ettil was nervous. He gripped the bars and watched the rockets shoot up into the night air. The stars were cold and numerous, they seemed to scatter when every rocket blasted up among them.

"Fools," whispered Ettil. "Fools!"

The cell door opened. One man with a kind of vehicle entered, full of books, books here, there, everywhere in the chambers of the vehicle. Behind him, the Military Assignor loomed.

"Ettil Vrye, we want to know why you had these illegal Earth books in your house. These copies of *Thrilling Wonder Stories, Scientific Tales, Fantastic Stories*. Explain." The man gripped Ettil's wrist.

Ettil shook him free. "If you're going to shoot me, shoot me. That literature, from Earth, is the very reason why I won't try to invade them. It's the reason why your invasion will fail."

"How so?" The Assignor scowled and turned to the yellowed magazines.

"Pick any copy," said Ettil. "Any one at all, nine out of ten stories in the year Nineteen-Twenty-Nine, 'Thirty to 'Fifty, Earth calendar has any Martian invasion successfully invading Earth."

"Ah!" the Assignor smiled, nodded.

"And then—" said Ettil. "Failing."

"That's treason! Owning such literature!"

"So be it, if you wish. But let me draw a few conclusions. Invariably, each invasion is thwarted by a young man, usually lean, usually Irish, usually alone, named Mick or Rick or Saul or Bannon, who destroys the Martians."

"You don't believe that!"

"No, I don't believe Earthmen can actually do that, no. But they have a background, understand, Assignor, of generations of children reading just such fiction, absorbing on it. They have nothing but a literature of invasions successfully thwarted. Can you say the same for Martian literature?"

"Well—"

"No."

"I guess not."

"You know not. We never dealt in stories of such fantastic natures. Now we rebel, we attack, and we shall die."

"I don't see your reasoning on that, where does this tie in with the magazine stories."

"Morale. A big thing. The Earthmen know they can't fail. It is in them like blood beating in their veins. They cannot fail. They will repel each invasions, no matter how well organized. Their youth of reading just such fiction as this has given them a faith we cannot equal. We Martians? We are uncertain, we know that we might fail. Our morale is low, in spite of the banged drums and tooted horns."

"I won't listen to this treason," cried the Assignor. "This fiction will be burned, as you will be, within the next ten minutes. You have a choice, Ettil Vrye. Join the Legion of War, or burn."

"It is a choice of deaths. I choose to burn."

"Men!"

He was hustled out into the courtyard. There he saw his carefully hoarded reading matter set to the torch. A special pit was prepared with oil five-foot deep in it. This, with a great thunder was set afire. Into this,

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in a minute, he would be pushed.

On the far side of the courtyard, in shadow, he noticed the solemn figure of his son standing alone, his great yellow eyes luminous with sorrow and fear. He did not put out his hand or speak, but only looked at his father like some dying animal, a wordless animal seeking rescue.

Ettil looked at the flaming pit. He felt the rough hands seize him, strip him, push him forward to the hot perimeter of death. Only then did Ettil swallow and cry out, "Wait!"

The Assignor's face, livid with the orange fire, pushed forward in the trembling air. "What is it?"

"I will join the Legion of War," replied Ettil.

"Good! Release him!"

The hands fell away.

As he turned he saw his son standing far across the court, waiting. His son was not smiling, only waiting. In the sky, a bronze rocket leaped across the stars, ablaze. . . .

AND now we bid good-by to these stalwart warriors," said the Assignor. The band thumped and the wind blew a fine sweet rain of tears gently upon the sweating army. The children cavorted. In the chaos, Ettil saw his wife weeping with pride, his son solemn and silent at her side.

They marched into the ship, everybody laughing and brave. They buckled themselves into their spider webs. All through the tense ship the spider webs were filled with lounging, lazy men. They chewed on bits of food and waited. A great lid slammed shut. A valve hissed.

"Off to Earth and destruction," whispered Ettil.

"What?" asked someone.

"Off to glorious victory," said Ettil, grimacing.

The rocket jumped.

Space, thought Ettil. Here we are banging across black inks and pink lights of space in a brass kettle. Here we are a celebratory rocket heaved out to fill the Earthmen's eyes with fear flames as they look up to the sky. What is it like, being far far away from your home, your wife, your child, here and now?

He tried to analyze his trembling. It was like tying your most secret inward working organs to Mars and then jumping out a million miles. Your heart was still on Mars, pumping, glowing. Your brain was still on Mars, thinking, crenulated, like an abandoned torch. Your stomach was still on Mars, somnolent, trying to digest the final dinner. Your lungs were still in the cool blue wine air of Mars, a soft folded bellows screaming for release, one part of you longing for the rest.

For here you were, a meshless, cogless automaton, a body upon which officials had performed clinical autopsy and left all of you that counted back upon the empty seas and strewn over the darkened hills. Here you were bottle-empty, fireless, chill, with only your hands to give death to Earthmen, a pair of hands is all you are now, he thought in cold remoteness.

Here you lie in the tremendous web, others about you, but they are whole, whole hearts and bodies. But all of you that lives is back there walking the desolate seas in evening winds. This thing here, this cold clay thing, is already dead.

"Attack stations, attack stations, attack!"

"Ready, ready, ready!"

"Up!"

"Out of the webs, quick!"

Ettil moved. Somewhere before him, his two cold hands moved.

How swift it has all been, he thought. A year ago, one Earth rocket reached Mars. Our scientists with their incredible telepathic ability copied it, our workers with their incredible plants reproduced it a hundredfold. No other Earth ship has reached Mars since then, and yet we know their language perfectly, all of us, we know their culture, their logic. And we shall pay the price of our brilliance. . . .

"Guns on the ready!"

"Right!"

"Sights!"

"Reading by miles?"

"Ten thousand!"

"Attack!"

A humming silence. A silence of insects throbbing in the walls of the rocket. The insect singing of tiny bobbins and levers and whirls of wheels. Silence of waiting men. Silence of gland emitting the slow steady pulse of sweat underarm, on brow, under staring pale eyes!

"Wait! Ready!"

Ettil hung onto his sanity with his fingernails, hung hard and long. I can't let go, I can't, he cried inward to his aching head. Hang on, for Tylla's sake, hang!

Silence, silence, silence. Waiting.

*Teeee-e-ee!*

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"What's that?"

"Earth radio!"

"Cut them in!"

"They're trying to reach us, call us, cut them in!".

*Eee-e-e!*

"Here they are! Listen!"

"Calling Martian invasion fleet!"

THE listening silence, the insect hum pulling back to let the sharp Earth voice crack in upon the rooms of waiting men.

"This is Earth calling. This is William Sommers, president of the Association of United American Producers!"

Ettil held tight to his station, bent forward, eyes shut.

"Welcome to Earth."

"What!" the men in the rocket roared. "What did he say!"

"Yes, welcome to Earth."

"It's a trick!"

Ettil shivered, opened his eyes to stare in bewilderment at the unseen voice from the ceiling source.

"Welcome, welcome to green, industrial Earth!" declared the friendly voice. "With open arms we welcome you, to turn a bloody invasion into a time of friendships that will last through all of Time."

"A trick!"

"Hush, listen!"

"Many years ago we of Earth renounced war, destroyed our atom bombs. Now, unprepared as we are, there is nothing for us but to welcome you. The planet is yours. We ask only mercy from you good and merciful invaders."

"It can't be true!" a voice whispered.

"It must be a trick!"

"Land and be welcomed, all of you," said Mr. William Sommers of Earth. "Land anywhere, Earth is yours, we are all brothers!"

Ettil began to laugh. Everyone in the room turned to see him. The other Martians blinked. "He's gone mad!"

He did not stop laughing until they hit him.

The tiny fat man in the center of the hot rocket tarmac at Green Town, California, jerked out a clean white handkerchief and touched it to his wet brow. He squinted blindly from the fresh plank platform at the fifty thousand people restrained behind a fence of policemen, arm to arm. Everybody looked at the sky.

"There they are!"

A gasp.

"No, just seagulls!"

A disappointed grumble.

"I'm beginning to think it would have been better to have declared war on them," whispered the mayor. "Then we could all go home."

*"Sh-h!"* said his wife.

"There!" The crowd roared.

Out of the sun came the Martian rockets.

"Everybody ready?" The Mayor glanced nervously about.

"Yes, sir," said Miss California 1965.

"Yes," said Miss America 1940, who had come rushing up at the last minute as a substitute for Miss America 1966 who was ill at home.

"Yes, sirree," said Mr. Biggest Grapefruit In San Fernando Valley 1956, eagerly.

"Ready, band?"

The band poised its brass like so many guns. "Ready!"

The rockets landed. "Go!"

The band played "California, Here I Come" ten times.

Noon until one o'clock, the mayor made a speech, shaking his hands in the direction of the silent, apprehensive rockets.

At one-fifteen the seals of the rockets opened.

The band played "Oh, You Golden State" three times.

Ettil and fifty other Martians leaped out, guns at the ready.

The mayor ran forward with the Key to Earth in his hands.

The band played "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town," and a full chorus of singers imported from Long Beach sang different words to it, something about "Martians Are Coming To Town."

Seeing no weapons about, the Martians relaxed, but kept their guns out.

FROM one-thirty until two-fifteen the Mayor made the same speech over for the benefit of the Martians.

At two thirty the Miss America of 1940 volunteered to kiss all the Martians if they lined up.

At two-thirty and ten seconds the band played "How Do You Do, Everybody," to cover up the confusion caused by Miss America's suggestion.

At two-thirty-five Mr. Biggest Grapefruit presented the Martians with a two-ton truck

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full of grapefruit.

At two-thirty-seven the Mayor gave them all free passes to the Elite and Majestic theatres, combining this gesture with another speech which lasted until after three.

The band played and the fifty thousand people sang, "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows."

It was over at four o'clock.

Ettil sat down in the shadow of the rocket, two of his fellows with him. "So this is Earth?"

"I say kill the filthy rats," said one Martian. "I don't trust them. They're sneaky. What's their motive for treating us this way?" He held up a box of something that rustled. "What's this stuff they gave me? A sample, they said." He read the label. BLIX, the new sudsy soap.

The crowd had drifted about, was mingling with the Martians like a carnival throng. Everywhere was the buzzing murmur of people fingering the rockets, asking questions.

Ettil was cold. He was beginning to tremble even more now. "Don't you feel it?" he whispered. "The tenseness, the evilness of all this. Something's going to happen to us. They have some plan. Something subtle and horrible. They're going to do something to us, I know."

"I say kill every one of them!"

"How can you kill people who call you "pal" and "buddy?" asked another Martian.

Ettil shook his head. "They're sincere. And yet I feel as if we were in a big acid vat melting away, away. I'm frightened." He put his mind out to touch among the crowd. "Yes, they're really friendly, hail-fellows-well met (one of their terms). One huge mass of common men, loving dogs and cats and Martians equally. And yet, and yet—"

The band played "Roll Out The Barrel." Free beer was being distributed through the courtesy of Hagenback Beer, Fresno, California.

The sickness came.

The men poured out fountains of slush from their mouths. The sound of sickness filled the land.

Gagging, Ettil sat beneath a sycamore tree. "A plot, a plot, a horrible plot," he groaned, holding his stomach.

"What did you eat?" the Assignor stood over him.

"Something that they called popcorn," groaned Ettil.

"And?"

"And some sort of long meat on a bun, and some yellow liquid in an iced vat, and some sort of fish and something called pastrami," sighed Ettil, eyelids flickering.

The moans of the Martian invaders sounded all about.

"Kill the plotting snakes!" somebody cried weakly.

"Hold on," said the Assignor. "It's merely hospitality. They over-did it. Up on your feet now, men. Into the town. We've got to place small garrisons of men about to make sure all is well. Other ships are landing in other cities. We've our job to do here."

The men gained their feet and stood blinking stupidly about.

"Forward, march!"

One, two, three, *four!* One, two, three, *four!* . . .

THE white stores of the little town lay dreaming in shimmering heat. Heat eminated from everything, poles, concrete, metal, awnings, roofs, tar paper, everything.

The sound of Martian feet sounded on the asphalt.

"Careful, men!" whispered the Assignor.

They walked past a beauty shop.

From inside, a furtive giggle.

"Look!"

A coppery head bobbed and vanished like a doll in the window. A blue eye glinted and winked at a keyhole.

"It's a plot," whispered Ettil. "A plot, I tell you!"

The odors of perfume were fanned out on the summer air by the whirling vents of the grottoes where the women hid like undersea creatures, under electric cones, their hair curled into wild whorls and peaks, their eyes shrewd and glassy, animal and sly, their mouths painted a neon red. Fans were whirring, the perfumed wind issuing upon the stillness, moving among green trees, creeping among the amazed Martians.

"For our sake!" screamed Ettil, his nerves suddenly breaking loose. His insides exploded. "Let's get in our rockets, go home! They'll get us! Those horrid things in there, see them! Those evil undersea things, those women in their cool little caverns of artificial rock!"

"Shut up!"

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"Look at them in there, drifting their dresses like cool green gills over their pillar legs!"

"Someone shut his mouth!"

"They'll rush out on us, hurling chocolate boxes and copies of Kleig Love and Holly Pick-ture, shrieking with their red greasy mouths! Inundate us with banality, destroy our sensibilities! Look at them, being electrocuted by devices, their voices like hums and chants and murmurs! Do you dare go in there?"

"Why not?" asked the other Martians.

"They'll fry you, bleach you, change you! Crack you, flake you away until you're nothing but a husband, a working man, the one with the money who pays so they can come sit in there devouring their evil chocolates! Do you think you could control them?"

"Yes, by the gods!"

From a distance a voice drifted, a high and shrill voice, a woman's voice saying, "Ain't that middle one there cute?"

"Martians ain't so bad after all. Gee, they're just men." said another, fading.

"Hey, there, *yoo-hoo!* Martians! Hey!"

Screaming, Ettil ran. . . .

He sat in a park and cried steadily. He remembered what he had seen. Looking up at the dark night sky he felt alone, so far from home, so deserted. Even now, as he sat among the still trees, in the distance he could see Martian warriors walking the streets with the Earth women, vanishing into the phantom darknesses of the little emotion palaces to hear the ghastly sounds of white things moving on gray screens, with little frizz-haired women beside them, wads of gelatinous gum working in their jaws, other wads under the seats, hardening with the fossil imprints of the women's tiny cat teeth forever imbedded therein. The cave of winds—the cinema.

"Hello."

He jerked his head in terror.

A woman sat on the bench beside him, chewing gum steadily, lazily. "Don't run off, I don't bite," she said.

"Oh," he said.

"Like to go to the pictures," she said.

"No."

"Aw, come on," she said. "Everybody else is."

"No," he said. "Is that all you do in this world?"

"All? Ain't that enough?" Her blue eyes widened suspiciously. "What you want me to do, sit home, read a book? Ha, ha, that's rich."

ETTIL stared at her a moment, before asking a question.

"You must do something else?" he said.

"Ride in cars. You got a car? You oughta get you a big new convertible Podler Six, gee they're fancy, any man with a Podler Six can go out with any gal, you bet," she said, blinking at him. "I bet you got all kinds of money, you come from Mars and all, I bet if you really wanted you could get a Podler Six and travel everywhere."

"To the show maybe?"

"What's wrong with 'at?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"You know what you talk like, mister?" she said. "A Communist! Yes, sir, that's the kinda talk nobody stands for, by gosh. Nothing wrong with our little old system. We was good enough to let you Martians invade and we never raised even our bitty finger, did we?"

"That's what I've been trying to understand," said Ettil. "Why did you let us?"

"Cause we're big-hearted, mister, that's why! Just remember that, big hearted." She walked off to look for someone else. Gathering courage to himself, he began to write a letter to his wife, moving the pen carefully over the paper on his knee.

Dear Tylla—

But again came an interruption. A small-little-girl-of-an-old-woman, with a pale round wrinkled little face shook her tambourine in front of his nose forcing him to glance up.

"Brother," she cried, eyes blazing. "Have you been saved?"

"Am I in danger?" Ettil dropped his pen, jumping.

"Terrible danger!" she wailed, clanking her tambourine, gazing at the sky. "You need to be saved, brother, in the worst way!"

"I'm inclined to agree," he said, trembling.

"We saved lots already today. I saved three myself, of you Mars people, ain't that nice?" She grinned at him.

"I guess so."

She was acutely suspicious. She leaned forward with her secret whisper, "Brother," she wanted to know. "You been baptized?"

"I don't know," he whispered back.

"You don't know?" she cried, flinging up hand and tambourine.

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"Is it like being shot?" he asked.

"Brother," she said. "You are in a bad and sinful condition. I blame it on your ignorant bringing up. I bet those schools on Mars are terrible, don't teach you no truth at all. Just a pack of made up lies. Brother, you got to be baptized if you want to be happy."

"Will it make me happy even in this world here?" he said.

"Don't ask for everything on your platter," she said. "Be satisfied with a wrinkled pea, for there's another world we're all going to that's better than this one."

"I know that world," he said.

"It's peaceful," she said.

"Yes."

"There's quiet," she said.

"Yes."

"There's milk and honey flowing."

"Why, yes," he said.

"And everybody's laughing."

"I can see it now," he said.

"A better world," she said.

"Far better." he said. "Yes, Mars is a great world."

"Mister," she said, tightening up and almost flinging the tambourine in his face. "You been joking with me?"

"Why, no." He was embarrassed and bewildered. "I thought you were talking about—"

"Not about mean old nasty Mars, I tell you, mister! It's your type that is going to boil for years, and suffer and break out in black pimples and be tortured—"

"I must admit Earth isn't very nice. You've described it beautifully."

"Mister, you're funning me again!" she cried angrily.

"No, no, please. I plead ignorance."

"Well," she said. "You're a heathen and heathen's are improper. Here's a paper. Come to this address tomorrow night and be baptized and be happy. We shouts and we stomps and we talk in voices, so if you want to hear our all-cornet, all-brass band, you come, won't you now?"

"I'll try," he said, hesitantly.

DOWN the street she went, patting her tambourine, singing at the top of her voice, "Happy Am I, I'm Always Happy."

Dazed, Ettil returned to his letter.

Dear Tylla:—To think that in my naivete I imagined that the Earth men would have to counter-attack with guns and bombs. No, no. I was sadly wrong. There is no Rick or Mick or Saul or Bannon, those lever-fellows who save worlds. No.

There are blonde robots with pink rubber bodies, real but somehow unreal, alive but somehow automatic in all responses, living in caves all of their lives. Their derrieres are incredible in girth. Their eyes are fixed and motionless from an endless time of staring at picture screens. The only muscles they have occur in their jaws from their ceaseless chewing of gum.

And it is not only these, my dear Tylla, but the entire civilization into which we have been dropped like a shovelful of seeds into a large concrete-mixer. Nothing of us will survive. We will be killed not by the gun but by the glad-hand. We will be destroyed not by the rocket but by the automobile—

Somebody screamed. A crash, another crash. Silence.

Ettil leaped up from his letter. Outside, on the street, two cars had crashed. One full of Martians, another with Earth men. Sickly, Ettil returned to his letter:

Dear, dear Tylla, a few statistics if you will allow. 45,000 people killed every year on this continent of America, made into jelly right in the can, as it were, in the automobiles. Red blood jelly, with white marrow bones like sudden thoughts, ridiculous horror thoughts, transfixed in the immutable jelly. The cars roll up in tight neat sardine rolls, all sauce, all silence.

Blood manure for green buzzing summer flies, all over the highways. Faces made into halloween masks by sudden stops. Halloween is one of their holidays, I think they worship the automobile on that night, something to do with death, anyway.

You look out your window and see two people lying atop each other in friendly fashion who, a moment ago, had never met before, dead. I foresee our army mashed, diseased, trapped in cinemas by witches and gum, and some time in the next day I shall try to escape back to Mars before it is too late.

Somewhere on Earth tonight, my Tylla, there is a Man With A Lever which when he Pulls it Will Save The World. The man is now unemployed. His switch gathers dust. He himself plays pinochle.

The women of this evil planet are drowning us in a tide of banal sentimentality, misplaced romance, and one last fling before the makers of glycerin boil them down for usage. Good-night, Tylla, wish me well, for I shall probably die trying to escape. My love to our child.

Weeping silently, he folded the letter and reminded himself to mail it later at the rocket post.

He left the park. What was there to do? Escape? But how? Return to the post late tonight, steal one of the rockets alone and go back to Mars? Would it be possible? He shook his head. He was much too confused.

All that he really knew was that if he stayed here he would soon be the property

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of a lot of things that buzzed and snorted and hissed, that gave off fumes or stenches. In six months he would be the owner of a large pink, trained ulcer, a blood pressure of algebraic dimensions, a myopia this side of blindness, and nightmares as deep as oceans and infested with improbable length of dream intestine through which he must violently force his way each night. No, no.

HE LOOKED at the haunted faces of the Earth men drifting violently along in their mechanical death boxes. Soon, yes very soon, they would invent an auto with six silver handles on it! How appropriate.

But now? Escape and only escape filled him. Back to the port, to the rockets, out of this town, this swallowing evil, this mass of tilt and quaver and thunder and horror. This river of neon and chromium in which it would be so easy to let go of the edge and slip under, never to reappear, drowned and sodden in the materials of this planet.

"Hey, there!"

An auto horn. A large long hearse of a car, black and ominous pulled to the curb. A man leaned out.

"You a Martian?"

"Yes."

"Just the man I gotta see. Hop in, quick, the chance of a life time. Hop in. Take you to a real nice joint where we can talk. Come on, don't stand there."

As if hypnotized, Ettil opened the door of the car, got in.

They drove off.

"What'll it be, E.V.? How about a Manhattan? Two Manhattans, waiter. Okay, E.V. This is my treat. This is on me and Big Studios! Don't even touch your wallet. Pleased to meet you, E.V., my names R. R. Van Plank, maybe you hearda me? No? Well shake anyhow."

Ettil felt his hand massaged and dropped. They were in a dark hole with music and waiters drifting about like ghosts. Two drinks were set down. It all had happened so swiftly. Now Van Plank, hands crossed on his chest, was surveying his Martian discovery.

"What I want you for, E.V. is this. It's the most magnanimous idea I ever got in my life. I don't know how it came to me, just in a flash. I was sitting home tonight and I thought to myself, "My stars, what a picture it would make! Invasion of Earth by Mars. So what I got to do? I got to find an adviser for the film. So I climbed in my car and found you and here we are. Drink up! Here's to your health and our future. *Skoal!*"

"But—" said Ettil.

"Now, I know, you'll want money, well we got plenty of that, besides I got a li'l black book full of peaches I can lend you."

"I don't like most of your Earth fruit and—"

"You're a card, Mac, really. Well, here's how I get the picture in my mind, listen." He leaned forward excitedly. "We got a flash scene of the Martians at a big pow-wow, drummin' drums, gettin' stewed on Mars, in the background are huge silver cities—"

"But that's not the way Martian cities are—"

"We got to have color, kid, color. Let your pappy fix this. Anyway, there are all the Martians doing a dance around a fire—"

"We don't dance around fires—"

"In *this* film you got a fire and you dance," declared Van Plank, eyes shut, proud of his certainty. He nodded, dreaming it over on his tongue. "Then we got a beautiful Martian woman, tall and blonde."

"Martian women are dark—"

"Look, I don't see how we're going to be happy, E.V. By the way, son, you ought to change your name. What was it again?"

"Ettil."

"That's a woman's name. I'll give you a better one. Call you Joe. Okay, Joe, as I was saying, our Martian women are gonna be blonde, because, see, just because. Or else your pappa won't be happy. You got any suggestions?"

"I thought that—"

"And another thing we gotta have is a scene, very tearful, where the Martian woman saves the whole ship of Martian men from dying when a meteor or something hits the ship. That'll make a whackeroo of a scene. You know, I'm glad I found you, Joe. We're going to have a good deal with us, I tell you."

ETTIL reached out and held the man's wrist tight. "Just a minute. There's something I want to ask you."

"Sure, Joe, shoot."

"Why are you being so nice to us? We invade your planet, and you welcome us in.

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everybody, like long lost children; why?"

"They sure grow 'em green on Mars, don't they? You're a naive-type guy, I can see from way over here. Mac, look at it this way, we're all Little People, ain't we?" He waved a small tan hand garnished with emeralds.

"We're all Common as dirt, ain't we? Well, here on Earth, we're proud of that. This is the century of the Common Man, Bill, and we're proud we're small. Bill, you're looking at a planet full of Saroyans. Yes, sir. A great big fat family of friendly Saroyans, everybody loving everybody. We understand you Martians, Joe, and we know why you invaded Earth. We know how lonely you were up on that little cold planet Mars, how you envied us our cities—"

"Our civilization is much older than yours—"

"Please, Joe, you make me unhappy when you interrupt. Let me finish my theory and then you talk all you want. As I was saying, you was lonely up there, and down you came to see our cities and our women and all, and we welcomed you in, because you're our brothers, Common Men like all of us.

"And then, as a kind of side incident, Roscoe, there's a certain little small profit to be had from this invasion. I mean for instance this picture I plan which will net us, neat, a billion dollars, I bet. And I also own a doll factory, Joe. Next week we start putting out a special Martian doll at thirty bucks a throw. Think of the millions there. I also got a contract to make a Martian game to sell for five bucks. There's all sorts of angles."

"I see," said Ettil, drawing back.

"And then of course there's that whole nice new market, think of all the depilatories and gum and shoe shine we can sell to you Martians."

"Wait. Another question?"

"Shoot."

"What's your first name? What's the R. R. stand for?"

"Richard Robert."

Ettil looked at the ceiling. "Do they sometimes, perhaps, on occasion, once in awhile, by accident, call you—Rick?"

"How'd you guess, Mac? Rick, sure."

Ettil sighed and began to laugh and laugh. He put out his hand. "So you're Rick? Rick! So you're Rick!"

"What's the joke, laughing boy, let poppa in!"

"You wouldn't understand, a private joke. Ha, ha!" Tears ran down his cheeks and into his open mouth. He pounded the table again and again. "So you're Rick. Oh, how different, how funny. No bulging muscles, no lean jaw, no gun. Only a wallet full of money and an emerald ring and a big middle!"

"Hey, watch the language! I may not be no Apollo, but—"

"Shake hands, Rick, I've wanted to meet you. You're the man who'll conquer Mars, with cocktail shakers and footarches and poker chips and riding crops and leather boots and checkered caps and rum Collinses."

"I'm only a humble business man," said Van Plank, eyes slyly down. "I do my work and take my humble little piece of money pie. But as I was saying, Mort, I been thinking of the market on Mars for Uncle Wiggily Games and Dick Tracy comics, all new, a big wide field never even heard of cartoons, right? Right! So we just toss a great big bunch of stuff on the Martians heads, they'll fight for it, kid, fight! Who wouldn't, for perfumes and Paris dresses and Oshkosh overalls, eh? And nice new shoes—"

"We don't wear shoes."

"What have I got here?" R. R. asked of the ceiling. "A planet full of Okies? Look, Joe, we'll take care of that, we'll shame everyone into wearing shoes. Then we sell them the polish!

"Oh."

HE SLAPPED Ettil's arm. "Is it a deal, will you be technical director on my film? You'll get two hundred a week to start, a five hundred top, what you say?"

"I'm sick," said Ettil. He had drunk the Manhattan and was now turning blue.

"Say, I'm sorry, I didn't know it would do that to you. Let's get some fresh air."

In the open air, Ettil felt better. He swayed. "So that's why Earth took us in?"

"Sure, son, any time an Earthman can turn an honest dollar, watch him steam. The customer is always right. No hard feelings. Here's my card, be at the Studio in Hollywood tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. They'll show you your office. I'll arrive at eleven and see you then. Be sure you get there at nine o'clock, it's a strict rule."

"Why?"

"Gallegher, you're a queer oyster, but I

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love you. Good night. Happy invasion!"

The car drove off.

Ettil blinked after, incredulous. Then, remembering his plan to escape, he ran along the street toward the rocket port.

The rockets lay shining at midnight, silent. From the city came the sounds of distant revelry. In the medical compound an extreme case of nervous breakdown was being tended to, a young Martian, who, by his screams, had seen too many films, drunk too much, heard too many songs on the little red and yellow boxes in the drinking establishments, and had been chased around inumerable tables by a large elephant-like woman. He kept murmuring:

"Can't breathe, crushed, trapped, oh, oh!"

The sobbing scream faded. Shaken, Ettil came out of hiding and ran across the tarmac. Among the abandoned ships, where the guards themselves lay drunkenly, the impact of their meeting with the strange sights, smells and sounds of an alien civilization too much for them.

Ettil stood in the port and listened. From the vast city came sounds, sounds of cars crashing and music playing and sirens screaming. And there were other sounds, too, that he could not hear, the insidious whir of malt machines stirring malts to fatten the warriors and made them lazy and forgetful, the narcotic voices of the cinema caves lulling and lulling the Martians fast, fast into a slumber through which, all of their remaining lives, they would sleep-walk.

A year from now, two years from now, how many Martians dead of cirrhosis of the liver, dead kidneys, high blood pressure, cars, disease. The invasion was indeed lost, the Martians as good as annihilated in a scourge of brutal thoughtless material.

He closed the rocket door. It would be very difficult, but somehow he would man the ship back home to Mars, back home to Tylla and his son and the empty world.

He lifted the ship into the air.

Below he saw the steaming glow of the Earth cities, like sulphurous mud pots boiling in the night.

And next year? The Blue Canal Night Club on Mars, the Ancient City Gambling Casino, Built Right Inside, Yes, Right Inside A Real Martian Ancient City! Neons, Highways, Tin Cans in the wine canals, papers blowing in the old cities, all of it, all of it.

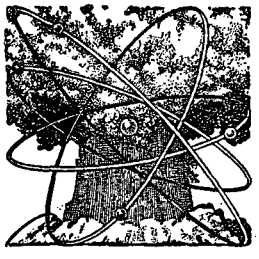
But not quite yet. In a few days he would be home, Tylla would be waiting with their son, running to meet him as he stepped out. And then for the last few years of gentle life he would sit with his wife in the blowing wind on the edge of the canal reading his good quiet books, sipping a rare and light wine, talking and living out their short time until the neon bewilderment fell from the sky.

There was at least a little time of peace ahead. And then perhaps he and Tylla could move into the blue mountains and hide for another year or two until the tourists came to snap their cameras and say how quaint things were.

He knew just what he would say to Tylla. "War is a bad thing, but Peace can be a living horror." When he had said that he would have said everything.

He leveled the rocket in its flight and saw red Mars rising. "Home," he said, and pressured the ship so it flew all the more swiftly on its way.

# The Coming Bombardier



APPARENTLY the coming thing in nuclear physics is the mesotron —an atomic fragment of infinitesimally brief existence far smaller than the smallest electron. First photographed late last year in a cloud chamber in a high-flying B-29, the mesotron may be the instrument of releasing atomic energy in the future, as it requires a less extensive plant to get it in operation as an atom bombardier.

Five mesotrons were scheduled to be in operation before the end of 1948 and, though mesotron bombardment of the atom is approximately as far advanced as was electron bombardment in 1939, progress is expected to be much more rapid due to the atomic experience of the last few years.

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# the MAN of the FUTURE

*In the years that lie ahead, man will need all his ability to adjust if he is to meet the stern challenge of his own discoveries! Conclusion of a series of special features*

**by F. ORLIN TREMAINE**

CAN you imagine Professor Albert Einstein playing outfield for the New York Yankees? Or the great Babe Ruth spending his life in a white smock, hunched over a row of laboratory test-tubes? The idea sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

Let's carry it a little farther. Try to picture Sister Kenney as a toe dancer—and the great woman athlete, Babe Didrikson, in the front row of a musical comedy chorus! There's something wrong with this picture!

The farther we extend the thought the funnier it gets. Try to picture Charles Steinmetz, the electrical wizard, riding in a six-



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day bicycle race! Then picture what confusion would follow if Jack Dempsey tried to act as consulting engineer for a great electric company.

Thomas A. Edison was much too preoccupied with experiments to be trusted to drive his own car—much less pilot a plane. Betty Carstairs drove speedboats skilfully in daring races, but she never invented anything.

### *A Look at the Past*

Less than a century has passed since Mendel was experimenting with peas in his garden, discovering the basic laws which govern heredity, and already the world has become a world of *specialists,* each working in his own specific type of environment. These specializations include both brain and body and they are largely a new development of modern civilization.

In order to get a perspective on the development of the man of the future, let's turn back and glance at the past compared to the present. Two hundred years ago—less than two hundred!—George Washington was a *farmer* (and a surveyor because he had enough education in mathematics to measure land!). There was practically no machinery. A herd of sheep cropped the grass close and made a lawn around his house.

Try as you will, you cannot remember the mention of a physician accompanying each new colony to America. Doctors were not mentioned because they were only just beginning to find themselves developing a professional standing. The local barber was called into *bleed* the patient if an illness was severe.

Otherwise home remedies and herbs served as medication. Every wife and mother knew how to brew the bark of the black cherry tree to stop bleeding, and how to rub goose grease on a chest in case of a bad cold.

The blacksmith who set up shop in every community usually ran a farm also. But he was the progenitor of the manufacturer, the inventor, machinist and mechanic of today. He hammered out the wrought-iron hinges for the doors and the runners for the sleighs and the rims for wagon-wheels.

As the years passed his work split up in a beginning of "specialization," into *gun*smithing, *lock*smithing, *silver*smithing. But the age of machines had not yet dawned in any important sense.

And this colonial era was only three centuries in advance of the age of chivalry. During that age the main divisions of activity or specialization were those of farmer, landed gentry, nobles and statesmen, soldiers and sailors.

The knight was the epitome of the military profession—and the chief qualifications of a knight were a tough, healthy body and money enough to buy a life-sized tin can and a horse!

Shopkeepers developed as population centers grew and farms were pushed farther and farther from the average home but spinning-wheels were still the main source of cloth in colonial days. While the men cleared the forests and tilled the land, the women prepared the food and made the clothes.

### *The Greater Range*

Today, the range of men's skills is as wide as the space which divides the special ability of the bloodhound, with its keen scent, from the greyhound, with its tremendous speed. Both are dogs, yet their specializations are completely different and these specializations are hereditary developments.

Among men the professional athlete and the laboratory scientist—neither of whom existed as a class in colonial days—live in even more contrasting areas of thought and activity. In moments of relaxation each observes the other's activities casually because he is a thinking being but keeps his primary interest in his own sphere. This, too, is a hereditary development.

The progressive environments of the past have left their impression on man's brain and on his body. Adaptation to these environments has become a hereditary mental and physical attribute of the present.

The human system adapts itself to changing world conditions just as surely as it becomes acclimated to the tropics and the polar regions through contact. It is a slow process but it is continuous.

The modern airplane pilot has become a technician. His nerves are attuned to flight and his body has become inured to the changing atmospheric pressures of high altitudes. But not all human systems are able to adjust themselves quickly to these modern stresses.

Many a capable young pilot was "washed out" during the war because his eardrums wouldn't "pop" at 35,000 feet elevation. His

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trait inheritance had not developed this factor. In time his body would have adapted itself, just as his mental attitude had already.

### *Adjustable Us*

The human body is resilient. Its tissues, arteries, veins and capillaries can undergo terrific strains—not only maintaining their form and function but growing stronger because of the exercise.

This fact is convincing proof that the brain and body can adapt themselves to the supersonic speeds which are almost upon us now—and more—to the speeds required for interplanetary travel when it comes. And the accomplishment will be no more wonderful than the fact that the body has adjusted itself to the force of gravity!

Sudden acceleration, from a still position to a speed comparable to that of sound, has provided one of the major physical hazards which scientists have had to consider. The very human factor of retaining consciousness is vital to the success of superfast air travel.

The tendency, under sudden, fast acceleration, is for the blood to be forced toward the rear of the body because of its inertia, packing under pressure into the rear of the brain.

This tends to leave the front part of the brain without sufficient blood and to bring unconsciousness—a "blackout". But under experimental conditions the body adapts itself naturally, and, as the generations pass, will "specialize" this adaptation.

In walking upright the body has adjusted itself to unequal pressures. The effort of the heart in pumping blood to the feet with the help of gravity is much less than in pumping blood upward to the head and brain *against* the force of gravity.

And the elastic strength of the veins of the lower legs and feet has to be much greater in order to force the blood back UP to the heart and lungs than does the strength of the veins in the head and neck in order to help it flow *down* with the aid of gravity.

### *Evolution to Come*

*Occasionally* you will see a case where certain veins have failed to develop and maintain sufficient added strength. But you will only see this in older people who have failed to keep their bodies in good condition through exercise. And you *never* heard of a person developing varicose veins on the head or neck! It is always in the legs, where gravity increases the strain on the veins.

So, by exercise of the veins through acceleration, which forces the blood to the back of the body, it is inevitable that the elastic strength of the strained veins and capillaries will be increased.

With the roar of the jet-motors the veins and arteries will tense and react to hold the blood in an even flow to the front of the brain, just as the veins of the legs force the blood upward despite the force of gravity.

Thus the body adapts itself through exercise to new environmental influences. And, in the course of a few generations, the adaptation becomes hereditary—that is to say that the force of sudden acceleration will become an "expected environment" of the human body.

In rare instances, fifty years from today, you may see an occasional "older person" with varicose veins on his or her *back*—on account of the failure to take proper exercises! And I suspect that it will be considered a sort of disgrace, a sign of backwardness and being behind the times, to develop varicose veins on the back of the neck!

Twenty years ago Captain Hawkes held practically every airplane speed record in existence, before his accidental death which was due to mechanical failure. I had the privilege of discussing the subject of flight with him on several occasions.

He told me then that, "I seem to have one very important trait. I don't black out or even get faint on account of high speeds. My body just seems to tense and take it." This is the secret which has enabled many pilots since then to withstand the strain of double the speed Hawkes experienced.

### *Human Specialization*

Sandhogs, the men who dig tunnels under great rivers, are forced to work under stepped-up pressures which would have caused death a century ago.

Through the use of compression chambers, which increase the pressure gradually, the body accepts and withstands the pressures without harm. However, before the men can return to normal pressure, they must spend time in decompression chambers which reduce the pressures gradually to normal.

The same problems arise in high altitude flights and have been answered through pressurized cabins in stratosphere planes. But

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in space travel these problems will be even more acute.

One of the problems engineers still have to conquer is the effect on a rocket ship of the lack of atmospheric pressure in space. And another is the possible tremendously increased pressure which may exist on some as yet unexplored planet.

A fish accustomed to the terrific pressures of the ocean depths has been known actually to explode as it reaches the surface of the water. Its body, geared atomically, to withstand great pressure, literally force itself apart as the resistance lessens.

It would be necessary to bring the fish to the surface in slow stages, permitting its tissues to become slowly adapted to the lessening pressure in nature's own great decompression chamber.

Nor is pressure the only condition to which the body can adapt itself. A linotype machine operator will handle a slug of hot metal just cast into type, examine it carefully and hand it to a curious visitor.

It may still be hot enough to burn and even blister the visitor's hand, yet it does not even cause discomfort to the operator because his fingers have become accustomed to the heat gradually in the course of his routine work.

### *Stokers and Bakers*

Stokers on steampowered ships and bakers who work before great ovens day after day become acclimated to extremes of heat which would cause serious burns to people completely unaccustomed to more than normal warmth. But the lesson of adaptation is all around us.

A man or girl with blond hair, blue eyes and a very light skin will get bad burns by spending two or three hours exposed to a hot sun. Yet by gradual exposure, a few minutes every day, the pigmentation in the skin will build a tan which resists the burns. By the end of a summer of gradual exposure, an entire day on the beach will result in no discomfort from the sun's rays.

There was an instance in ancient history when a king, after the fashion of the time, sent a beautiful slave girl as a gift to the ruler of an adjoining state. The girl approached the throne of her new master, smiling, and halted a few feet before him.

He, to show his favor, had a courtier hand her a bunch of roses. But, even while she stood before him, the roses began to wither! His keen eye noted this and had her led away. The girl had been fed a deadly poison in tiny doses until her system became both inured and saturated.

It no longer affected her but had the power to kill any living thing with which she was long in contact. We do not know exactly what poison was referred to here but we do know that a comparable use of arsenic might have a similar effect. The body of a human being will adjust itself to the presence of the poison until it can absorb many times the amount necessary to cause instant death if taken at once.

### *Manipulated Heredity*

Such facts as these, supported by experiments like those discussed in the previous issues, led Dr. Leslie C. Dunn of Columbia University to announce "discoveries" which would *permit future scientists to manipulate human heredity to produce desired types* of persons.

In other words we are faced with an era in which we can to some extent determine the type of beings we wish to bring into the world so as to fit them for the wonders which lie ahead in the next generation and the next. And, as you have seen, we are already doing this through occupation specializations, though not deliberately as Dr. Dunn feels to be possible.

So the man of the future will be not a single type but many, as many as there are specializations in a complicated world. Certain general characteristics of the race will be recognizable in all, of course.

Because of the increasing use of machinery both men and women will develop more ambidexterity, since quick action is required of both hands and both feet in the handling of machinery. The slow conquest of disease will bring a certain "agelessness" in appearance.

As the years pass it will become increasingly difficult to guess the age of anyone between 25 and 65 because disease and tissue-malnutrition are the chief causes of "age-signs" in any healthy mature person.

### *Trends Ahead*

There will be a tendency for the ears to flatten and shrink as a protection against the increasing roar of vibration which accompanies the increase in the number and size of machines. But these same ears will develop a

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hearing for the higher vibrations which develop through radio waves, radar, electronics—and which precede life-endangering breaks in motors.

The general shape, and muscular development, of men and women will become more and more alike as women move into occupations and perform tasks which were formerly done only by men.

As women depend more and more on artificial feeding for their offspring their breasts will shrink, until the "boyish form" which was fashionable in the late twenties will be commonplace.

Even today we see the forerunners of this condition in the wide advertising of artificial "form-supports." Women's feet are already becoming bigger. In the course of two or three generations men's and women's shoe sizes will be practically identical.

Broadening education plus the continued influence of radio will completely eliminate sectional accents and will result in the vast majority of the population becoming familiar with practically every subject of interest in the world.

Individuals capable of individual thinking and not too lazy to exercise their brains will become more and more individual in their thoughts. But the vast majority of the population will continue to function in routine channels.

### *Easy to Spot*

Types of people will be more readily recognized at sight because of the intensification of study connected with each occupation, and because aptitude tests will choose those best fitted by heredity to undertake each study and occupation.

Even today we would naturally think of Steinmetz, Edison and Einstein as members of a general type—and Babe Ruth, Ted Williams and Hank Greenberg as fitting into another type classification. This is the result of a natural selection only half a century in development.

The stratosphere flier and the space-pilot will be solidly built men—not too big—with bodies as hard as nails. Their heads will have a tendency to hunch into their shoulders as a result of constant takeoffs at great acceleration. Their shoulder and back muscles will be more than ordinarily developed as the result of tensing against shock.

These qualities will gradually become inherited traits of future generations of the *flying type* of men. They will replace the type of men we called "soldiers of fortune" during the century past.

Their skins may develop a slightly different colored tan as a result of the continued bombardment of their space ships by cosmic rays beyond the upper levels of the atmosphere. No matter what is done to screen the hull of the ship from these rays, some effect will result.

And this effect might easily be a greenish or purplish tinge, showing through the ordinary suntan. Over a period of generations the descendants of these men would be born with bodies whose defense against cosmic rays is inherited in the form of a slight greenish or purplish tone in an otherwise white skin.

Muscular coordination will increase in timing and accuracy as the hereditary result of the handling by several generations of machinery which requires split-second action. The result will be continuously improving skill in athletics of the future. World records are set to be broken, year after year. New idols have appeared regularly in track meets and Olympic games.

### *Growth of Coordination*

The growth of coordination has universal application but will also be specialized like occupations. A pianist finds split-second motion necessary in the hands, arms and feet but uses a different muscle combination than does the runner. Heredity has already developed a musical type of person today—a type with long fingers and the accompanying traits of perfect rhythm and tone-sense.

The familiarity of the present age with machinery will result in automatic, or instinctive, reactions to emergencies resulting from the operation of motor power. And, as the instincts develop new channels of expression, the co-operation between man's conscious and unconscious mind the (the seat of the instincts) will quicken his entire mental process.

The man of the future will think fast and accurately. The speed of his travel, and of his very existence will depend upon fast thinking. It will be necessary to self-preservation if he keeps pace with the new occupation requirements.

Even were he to live on a farm where the most leisurely pace of living existed, he would be entirely surrounded by machinery

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and would not be free of the necessity for fast thinking.

Every quality which will combine in the man of the future exists in some man of today. Hereditary development will collect these traits in groups in single individuals within the next century. In a way life, governed by machines may become less romantic.

The increasing similarity between the two sexes also tends to blunt the idea of romance. But the thrill of new developments, of new worlds to be conquered, of keen, vivid, interesting conversations with the people around you will make up for a great deal. There will be little place in the new age for a blonde who is "beautiful but dumb." She would be considered atavistic!

### *We're Part of the Future*

You and I and all of us who are young enough to look forward twenty years or more are a part of the developing future. We are falling into the position of the "first" men of the future.

A full century—five generations—of expanding education and of the age of machines and airtravel have prepared us, by inheritance, for the coming of the *Atomic Age*. We are comparable to the first Pilgrim colony that settled in the new world—but we are the generation which will clear the forests of confusion and lay the travel routes and build the cities.

You, as an individual, will fall into one of the classifications which distinguish the specialists of the future. There is no reason for confusion. Accept the fact that a new era is upon us, and search out your specific skills and aptitudes by studying your own brain and background as we discussed it in the previous issues.

Your innate desires and deep seated longings will guide you into the channel where you will best fit—that is, they will if you have the courage to follow those desires whether they lead to an airplane mechanic's greasy coveralls or to a bench in an experimental laboratory. Follow through on the specialization to the best of your ability because you will be helping to set the pattern for the coming generations to follow and develop.

### *Prepare Your Mind*

If your specialization proves to be air travel do your best to learn everything that can be learned on the subject. Prepare your mind to accept the new conditions which will constantly develop through the development of jet-motors.

The atom-powered jet-plane will be an established fact, practical and operating, within the next five years. You must consciously try to prepare your body to offset the increasing shocks of speed and your brain to think fast and accurately in an emergency.

To some extent, even today, you and I could "type" persons in a crowd—one as a pugilist, another as an office-worker, a third as a former soldier because of his bearing. The next generation will be able to say with fair certainty, "He is an aviator," when they see the characteristic build. And in another hundred years this obvious development will be easily and clearly discernable.

The mating of families with generations of pilots behind them will result in strengthening the specific traits which have been developed through experience.

The marriage of athlete to athlete will, in the course of a few generations bear fruit in faster coordination and speed and eyesight, just as the mating of great horses like *Man o' War* to the offspring of other great horse-lines has resulted in the appearance of such amazing colts as *"Citation"* and *"Coaltown"* the sensations of the past year on the racetracks.

### *The Pattern Changes*

So the picture grows into a pattern somewhat different from those of the past when the ideal community contained a little of everything, occupations alone were grouped, and that during the work periods only.

The future will see a tendency for occupational groups to colonize their homes as well as their working quarters. The result will be occupational segregation to an increasing extent. Even social life will become more and more grouped according to specializations as the old theater gives way to television in the entertainment field.

And this social grouping will in turn result in more marriages between persons in the same specialized field, thus increasing the trait inheritance of the children of these groups.

Schools will lean more and more toward aptitude tests in setting the standard for each child's education and that education will be

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pointed toward the goal of complete specialization from the time he starts to study. He will not have to wait until he is in high school or college to begin his special professional training.

This developing specialization does *not* mean that every child born to air pilot parents will become an air pilot. The aptitudes and desires of many such children will move them into different specialization groups educationally.

This fact will serve to prevent segregation according to occupation from becoming too complete.

Family groups will contain farmers, aviators, merchants, soldiers. But the types will be as distinct as though the children had had different parents. The law of dominant and recessive traits will govern the recurrence of physical and mental types just as accurately as it does the recurrence of giant and dwarf peas, and speed in racehorses.

### *Men of the Future*

The men of the future will include the tall, gangling type of physique but such individuals will not be the space pilots. There will be a recurrence of obesity in certain individuals, just as there has been in the past—but such persons will have to fit into a specialization where it is not a handicap. They will not be athletes or aviators. But either of the above types can easily become successful merchants, farmers or artists.

Life on a farm of the future will be an exciting adventure by comparison to the farm life we are accustomed to. The soil will be conserved and its vitality renewed by radiation. Vegetables will be tested for high-vitamin content and a standard set on the nourishment each must contain.

Surplus crops will be vacuum-packed in sealed containers which will keep them fresh and ready for future consumption. Under the influence of irradiation pests will be controlled and fruits will be bigger and more nourishing.

The farmer, himself, will have to be a technician and engineer in order to control the machinery housed in his buildings. He will listen to periodic weather reports for his district, telling him whether to turn on the *frost-control* or to open the artificial moisture system in case of drought.

Crop sizes will be under strict supervision to prevent either under or oversupply, including a sizable food reserve for the nation. He will be well-read, well-educated and will have access to both entertainment and to vast libraries of instructive information through his television screen.

Being the basic food, wool and leather producers, for the nation, on whom its well-being depends—the farmers will be chosen just as carefully through aptitude tests as are the members of other occupational groups.

Every individual will have his place in the new world. As the next twenty years pass less time will be required to perform all necessary work but in its performance pin-point accuracy will be required.

You and I must make adjustments in our lives, because we face the transition period. The men of the future, born one hundred to five hundred years from now, will inherit the world we are in the process of helping to create.

**Those Fabulous Hogbens Again Defy Space and Time in**

# SEE YOU LATER, by HENRY KUTTNER

**COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE — PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES!**

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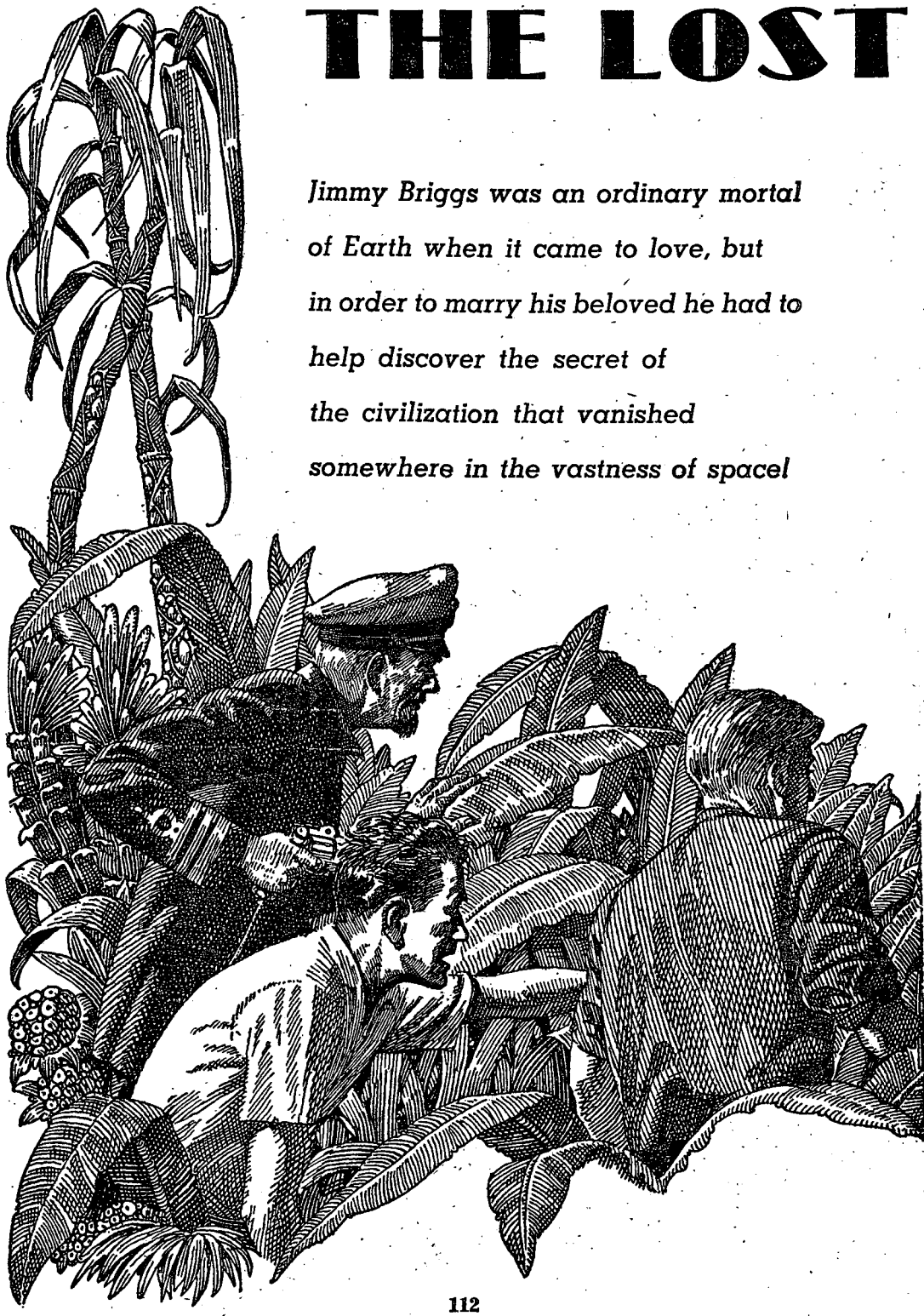
# THE LOST

*Jimmy Briggs was an ordinary mortal of Earth when it came to love, but in order to marry his beloved he had to help discover the secret of the civilization that vanished somewhere in the vastness of space!*





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# RACE

## by MURRAY LEINSTER

WHEN Jimmy Briggs signed on the *Carilya* he had every reason to think it would be a normal, but regrettably long, voyage. He had almost enough credits saved up to get married on, and he needed a long trip to give him the rest. He knew the *Carilya* was bound for Cetis Alpha Two with a cargo for the new Space-Guard base there, and that she'd be taking a new route and making the customary one or two obligatory landings on the way.

All in all, it looked like just the sort of trip he needed. And the *Carilya* was a brand-new ship, bessendium-fueled, five thousand tons cargo capacity, and eight men in the crew. The pay would be good, and he'd come back and get married.

But after he'd taken the psycho tests and was certified honest and reported on board—he couldn't leave the space port once he was on duty—he found that Danton was the chief engineer. And that did not please him. Danton was married to Jimmy's girl's best friend, and Jimmy knew what a life she led, how unhappy she was. But, anyhow, Danton alone was enough to make one prefer to ship on another vessel.

Danton regarded Jimmy with ironic eyes the instant he came on board, and immediately tried to pump him about what his wife Jane had been doing.

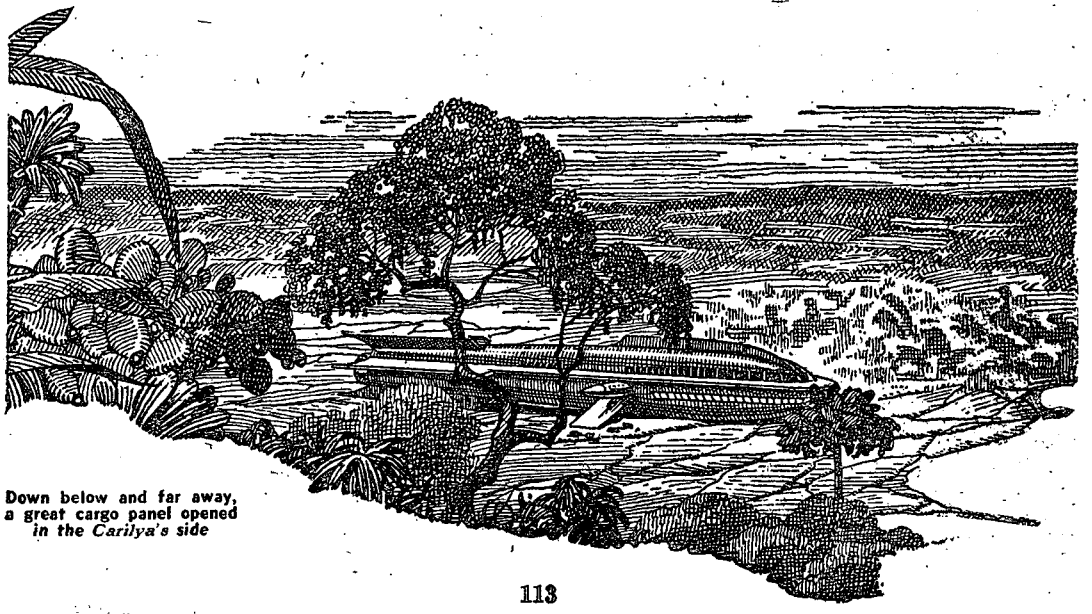
"I haven't seen Jane," Jimmy told him. "I was busy with my own affairs. Sally and I had a lot of being-together to do, because I'll be away a year. When I get back we're going to get married. I didn't bother asking about your wife. Come to think of it, I did see her for a minute on the vision-screen. She'd called Sally for something or other. She said you'd shipped out. But that was all."

Danton ground his teeth.

"We haven't lifted yet," he raged, "and she's already spreading the word I've gone!"

"Sally's her best friend," snapped Jimmy. "Should Jane try to keep it a secret from her? Look here, Danton! You'd better ask to be relieved and stay aground if you can't trust Jane! And I'm busy!"

Jimmy departed, to put away his dunnage. And he found he would share quarters with Ken Howell. He swore as Howell looked up from a bunk and saw him. Howell was the man Jane had originally intended to marry. They'd quarreled and he'd signed on



Down below and far away, a great cargo panel opened in the *Carilya's* side



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for a voyage to Centaurus, and when he got back she was married to Danton.

Jimmy's girl Sally said indignantly that Danton had lied to bring it about, and that he ought to be hung. But it didn't change the situation. Jane was married to Danton, and that was that. Jimmy put down his bag and said wrathfully:

"This is going to be a sweet voyage! Did you know Danton was going to be on board?"

"No," said Howell. "I wouldn't have signed on if I had."

"Has he seen you?" demanded Jimmy.

"He has," Howell said steadily. "He grinned at me and said that at least this time he didn't have to worry about my hanging around Jane while he was gone!"

Jimmy unpacked, anger stirring within him. Space-travel on an interstellar trip isn't too easy on the nerves, anyhow. Months on end of monotonous voyaging makes for ragged tempers. It's a standard, and only partly humorous, saying among spacemen that the Lost Race committed suicide because it did too much space-traveling. There isn't even much relaxation when a trip is over, unless a man takes his discharge.

The reason is bessendium, of course, which is the perfect space-ship fuel, with an atomic number of one hundred and seven and absolutely controllable fissionability. Five pounds of bessendium will power a ship like the *Carilya* for four thousand light-years of flight in overdrive. But it is worth eight million credits per pound, and there is an avid black market for it.

A space-ship's fuel is worth more than the ship and its cargo together, and with half a chance a man can put it in his pocket and walk away with it. So the precautions for its safekeeping are extreme. In space a man fights tedium and nerves. On the ground he feels he's watched every second. And he is.

With Danton on board, the voyage was bound to be bad anyhow. With Howell on board, it would be explosive. Jimmy contemplated the future with a violent indignation. He couldn't be philosophical about it.

For instance, when the *Carilya* lifted and they watched the surface of Earth change from a seeming flat plane to a monstrous bowl, and then suddenly flicker into its actual shape of a colossal ball, Danton was watching with him from a sternport. When Earth looks like a ball, you're in space.

"Now," said Danton, grinding his teeth, "Jane knows I can't watch her! But she can't take up with Howell, anyhow. Bad luck for him!"

JIMMY walked away. He kept busy while the *Carilya* went cautiously up beyond the plane of the ecliptic, meteor-detectors out, and then sighted on Dabla and went into overdrive. In overdrive she was safe from any external accident, but she was absolutely on her own. If anything happened short of her destination, it would be just too bad.

Overdrive speed is so huge a multiple of the speed of light that it would take forty times the whole Space-Guard fleet six months to search along the path a ship could cover in a day. So if the *Carilya* didn't turn up in port, there'd be no use looking for her. She'd be gone. Period.

Jimmy didn't worry about that. A spaceman doesn't. You face failure of machinery when you have to. But it isn't only in prison that men go stir-crazy. Locked in a beryllium-steel hull, hurtling endlessly through the featureless nothing that is overdrive, nerves crack and men quarrel for no reason. Any one of the thousands of theories about the Lost Race is good for a fistfight on any space-voyage any day.

More than once a man has jumped hysterically out of an airlock for no cause that sober sense can fathom. Many a ship has come to port with its crew more fitted for an insane asylum than the tedious examinations they have to undergo to make sure they haven't bits of the ship's fuel hidden in their possessions or even their bodies.

And the situation on the *Carilya* was bad from the beginning.

But after one week's journeying, the stars winked into being and the *Carilya* was only some fifty million miles from Dabla, which was good astrogation. The *Carilya* reported by space-radio, and of course her crew-members had the privilege of sending personal messages back to Earth. The messages would go by the first ship to make the run from Dabla—on overdrive, of course.

Jimmy got his off. Howell, he noticed, sent nothing. Danton grinned unpleasantly at Jimmy after the *Carilya* went back for more weeks of travel in the weird half-reality that is overdrive.

"I sent Jane a message," said Danton chuckling. "Told her I'd been hurt a little in an accident involving Howell and myself.

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She'll read that as a fight. And she knows me—she'll figure that if it's started already, one of us won't come back. And she won't know which to expect! She'll keep busy wondering!"

Jimmy said coldly: "Do you intend that only one of you will go back?"

"It's my intention," snarled Danton, "to figure out some way to get aground and stay where I'll know what's going on! If I get a chance to clean up—"

Jimmy shrugged and moved away. Danton wouldn't have admitted murderous intention, of course. If he had any such plan, he would make devious, elaborate arrangements for a seeming accident to Howell. And he'd have nearly a year of maddening space-travel in which to contrive it.

The psychology of men in space is the psychology of men in prison, with nothing to think of but crazy grievances and wild plans for impossible actions. It was just important enough for Jimmy to sound out Howell, indirectly.

"What do you think about on your off time?" he asked Howell in apparent casualness. "You don't read a lot. You don't play games. You don't do much talking. What do you do with your mind?"

Howell looked at him and shrugged.

"I don't think about Danton, if that's what you mean," he said evenly. "If I did I'd crack up! I used to, sometimes—think of Jane and the trick he played to make her think I'd married some space-port gal before I shoved off, one time. But that's not healthy to remember."

"What *do* you think about, then?" demanded Jimmy.

"The Lost Race," said Howell drily. "I've read everything that anybody's ever written about it, and listened to all the crazy theories that have sprung up in ships' forecastles. I'm trying to fit them together and throw away the stuff that cancels out, to see if there's anything left."

Jimmy was relieved. A man who puzzles over the Lost Race can go crazy—it's happened—but he isn't objectionable. The pursuit leads to an argumentative streak and impassioned convictions, but nobody can be expected to do anything about it.

THE LOST RACE, of course, is that unknown breed of creatures which built the smashed cities on Mars, and the smashed installations on Titah, and the blown-up cities on the Centaurean planets, and the utterly devastated ruins on Sirius Four and Arcturus Three and some hundreds of other oxygen-atmosphere planets. Maybe they built on Earth, but if so a hundred thousand years of Earth's climate has wiped out their traces.

Their ruins are found in an area two thousand light-years across. They had metals and alloys—scraps of which have very markedly advanced human metallurgy—and they built roads and dug canals and moved earth and stone in incredible masses. They must have had space-travel, and they must have had arts and possibly music and literature. But above all they had a genius for the destruction of their own edifices, so that all that is left is rubble and dust.

It is as if they committed suicide some fifty or a hundred thousand years ago and painstakingly destroyed every vestige of their civilization in the process. And nobody knows much more than that about the Lost Race.

"Are you getting anywhere?" asked Jimmy. "I wouldn't mind hearing a new guess about them."

Howell shook his head.

"They weren't like us," he said. "If we land on a new planet, somebody's sure to scribble on a bit of rock, 'John Smith of Earth stood here, June 28, 1994.' We want to leave evidence of ourselves. If we knew the human race was going to die out, we'd probably tidy everything up and try to prepare records for somebody to find a million years from now, so they'd admire us. The Lost Race didn't. They wanted to end. They wanted the universe to be as if they had never existed."

"It's been guessed they were exterminated by another race that hated them," objected Jimmy.

Howell shook his head.

"The exterminators would have left a boast if they'd hated them," he said drily. "Mere destruction wouldn't have been enough. Genghis Khan built a pyramid of skulls, after his enemies were destroyed, to make good a boast. Maybe the Lost Race just got fed up with themselves."

Jimmy abruptly told him of Danton's message to his wife Jane. Howell said evenly:

"What of it? I'd like to do something for Jane, but that doesn't necessarily mean doing something to Danton. After all, he's doing that pretty well himself. I couldn't possibly

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avenge myself as thoroughly as he's doing for me. And if he does kill me, he'll pay for it—and I don't particularly care."

Jimmy had a queer conviction that Howell meant it. But he didn't feel at ease. The voyage was beginning to have its effect upon him, too. The first month or so always fixes the pattern for the rest. Danton had an occupation in his morbid suspicion of his wife and—on this voyage—his hatred of Howell. It was not a very healthy occupation, to be sure.

Howell speculated on the Lost Race. Other members of the crew carved plastic or wrote poetry, or anything at all to keep from being bored to insanity.

The *Carilya* hurtled on in overdrive. Days passed. Weeks passed. One month. Six weeks. Then—

They came out of overdrive and gazed fascinatedly through the ship's ports at the stars. There were no longer any familiar constellations, but there was a yellow sun off to port with at least three planets. The *Carilya* headed toward the sun, its meteor detectors weaving restlessly through space. The Space-Guard was undermanned and short of ships, so the licensing of a voyage usually stipulated a landing or two for first-contact reports.

The Guard was feverishly expanding its explorations in hopes of finding a Lost Race city that wasn't completely smashed, and in the effort was hopping from one star-cluster to another without exhaustive exploration anywhere. So commercial ships were called on to do surveys the Guard couldn't at the moment attempt.

It was safe enough, certainly. The Lost Race had left behind no other race that might be inimical to man. First landings were still so commonplace that at least a dozen times a year a freighter skipper turned up with news of an Earth-type planet that could be colonized, and hopefully applied for full property rights in a world as large and perhaps as rich as the home of the human race.

A FOURTH and fifth planet turned up as the *Carilya* neared the sun. But Number Two had seas and cloud banks and a polar ice-cap. The *Carilya* swung up to it, matched velocity, and prepared to descend.

Then it checked. An infrared scanner had found a huge area barren of all vegetation. The *Carilya* swung round the world's bulge to descend beside that place, which could be nothing but another blasted city of the Lost Race.

A mile up, Jimmy Briggs saw an oddity. It was a stretch of unshattered highway with a round, unpulverized area at its end. He called the control room and pointed it out, but the *Carilya* did not adjust again. She went on down, slowly and gingerly, and at last grounded with a barely perceptible bump. Then a pause for gravity, magnetic, and barometric readings. Air-analysis—needless, this last, because Lost Race ruins were found only on oxygen-type planets. A bacteria-type test. Then—

"All clear to land, if you wish," came the skipper's voice over the speaker system.

Jimmy Briggs made ready to go outside and breathe fresh air once more. He was sticking a blaster in his pocket when Howell came to their joint cabin.

"I heard your report on that funny business astern," he said. He looked animated. "I got a squint at it myself. It looks like there was a rise of ground between it and the city proper, and the blasts that smashed the city missed it. It won't be true, of course, but we might look."

"Sure," said Jimmy. "My idea exactly!"

Danton came out of the engine room as they passed by. It occurred to Jimmy that he hadn't seen Danton in days. There were only eight men on the ship, but once in the absolute eventlessness of overdrive it was possible to miss seeing any one of them.

Danton locked the engine-room door behind him. His eyes glittered as he looked at Howell. Jimmy realized that he'd had nearly two months of brooding, with a pathological case of jealousy to start with. He nodded briefly and hurried out to the air lock.

"I never thought to ask you," Jimmy said with curiosity. "Do you run into Danton often?"

"I've no need to, and I avoid him when I can," Howell said without emotion. "He's played dirty tricks, and he's going crazy in his own way. I think his suspicion of Jane is a result, and not a cause. I've worked out something about the Lost Race that might apply to him."

When they left the spaceship, Jimmy smelled green stuff and growing things. He barely glanced at the desolate square miles of rubble that had once been a city. To land on a planet which was not Earth was no longer a novelty, and surely Lost Race ruins were not oddities any longer. The two men

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from the *Carilya* pushed through knee-high stuff like moss, looking for the highway Jimmy thought he'd glimpsed from the air.

A hundred-foot hummock with giant canes clothing its near side was the clue. A quarter of a mile, and they found shattered stone road-surfacing underfoot.

"It comes out of the fact that there is precognition," said Howell, tramping along beside Jimmy. "There is foreknowledge of things to come. It's been proved. It's a function of the subconscious mind. Besides the demonstrable cases, we have hunches we can't acount for, and fairly often they work out."

Jimmy nodded, sniffing pleasurably and looking about him as he moved on.

"Surely!" he agreed. "Hunches are precognition—except when they're wishful thinking."

"And we have consciences," Howell went on. "They're functions of the subconscious, too. It's not far-fetched to guess that a bad conscience is a leak from the subconscious, which sees some bad breaks coming as a result of some dirty trick we've played. On that basis, Danton has a bad time because his subconscious is warning him of something unpleasant in the offing.

"He can't read the warning clearly. He's got precognition of disaster, but he can't, or won't, recognize its cause. So he's scared. Jealousy is a form of fear. If 'conscience doth make cowards of us all,' because it's precognition, then it'll make some of us insanely jealous."

"Let's not think about Danton just now," said Jimmy. "Look!"

A HORNED beast stared at them and broke into headlong flight, and then spread giant wings and flapped over a nearby forest edge and vanished. Jimmy blinked.

"You've got a blaster in case of need, and so have I," Howell said, dismissing the beast without comment and taking up his theme again. "What I really worked out was that maybe the Lost Race died of finding out the future. We humans have courage to go on because we don't know the future. If our fathers had foreseen all they were going to have to endure in the Third World War, for instance, they couldn't have taken it. Not knowing, they only had to meet it moment by moment, day by day, and they lived through it and stayed sane."

Jimmy mumbled an agreement.

"Suppose the Lost Race saw the future in its entirety?" Howell continued. "Suppose they saw the inevitable result of something they'd done? It was in the future. They couldn't avoid it if they lived on into that future. Suppose they saw—oh, suppose they saw that the atomic power they had been using had altered their germ plasm and that their race was due to turn into a race of monsters which they considered horrible and obscene. What would they do?"

Jimmy looked startled. "I suppose they'd commit suicide." Then, surprisedly, he said "They did!"

"Right!" said Howell. "There's a new theory of what happened to the Lost Race! It may be nonsense, but it explains everything, even to the smashing of their cities so that no race which followed them could duplicate their civilization and share their fate."

Suddenly, the highway underfoot ceased to be rubble. It was behind the hundred-foot hillock. And it was absolutely unbroken. Crawling green things grew over it, but they had not cracked it. And ahead there was a roofless structure, neither shattered nor smashed nor damaged save by creeping vines which grew upon it.

The two of them fell silent. Jimmy drew a quick breath. They had come upon an artificial amphitheatre built by the Lost Race, unharmed unless by time. It faced a metal hood not unlike a bandstand shell both in size and form. Before the hood there was a small object like a podium. They gazed.

"This," said Jimmy, "is It! A thing the Lost Race didn't smash! We take photos and get them to the Space-Guard. They will go happily insane! What is it, do you suppose?"

"It looks like a lecture platform," said Howell humorously. "Maybe they listened to lectures until they all went mad. But that thing yonder puzzles me!"

They climbed over lush vegetation to the podium-like object some three and a half feet high. It was of metal, and it looked rather like a seat, too, but no human could have sat comfortably in it. It slanted sharply, and there was a carved-out slot as if for a tail to rest in it. Howell climbed up and sat awkwardly in it, his legs dangling over. Then he gasped.

The hollow part of the bandstand shell was no longer hollow. A thick mistiness filled it, swirling strangely here and there.

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Howell leaped out of the queer seat. The mistiness vanished instantly. He looked at Jimmy, and then looked back. They poked around, wordless and not quite believing.

Then Jimmy said abruptly, "I'll try it!" and climbed into the seat.

Mists swirled again. They were vaguely colored and there were traces of form, here and there. Jimmy said, "The Skipper'll have to see this! I wish he were here now!"

Then the mists cleared—and the Skipper was there! The mists had coalesced into his form! He stood outside the air lock of the *Carilya,* also plainly in view inside the metal hood. He was full-size and in three dimensions. He was talking to Danton.

Jimmy gaped, and slid off the seat. The Skipper and Danton and the visible part of the space-ship vanished together. Instantly.

"Television?" Howell said. "Still working after a hundred thousand years?"

Jimmy gulped. He blinked. He'd thought of the Skipper and wished to see him—*and he'd seen him!*

"I—thought of the Skipper—" He swallowed. "I—tuned him in by thinking of him— Wait a minute!"

HE CLIMBED into the seat again. broke into headlong flight, and then within this bandshell hood on the unnamed planet of a merely numbered sun, he saw the signing-on office in the spaceport back on Earth. He recognized the man administering the psycho test to somebody wearing the psycho mask. Then he closed his eyes and shook his head. He opened them again.

The spaceport office was wiped out. He looked into the livingroom of Sally's home. Sally came in the door. While he watched hungrily, she went to the little Viewer Jimmy had given her and flicked the lever. Jimmy saw his own image on the viewer-screen, some hundreds of light-years distant, moving in the vision-recording he'd made for Sally to remember him by! He slipped off the seat.

"It—went all the way back to Earth!" he said thickly. "You try it!"

"One creature could show thousands of others what he tuned in on," Howell said oddly. "One person or creature had to control it." He paused. Then. "Go back and tell the Skipper, Jimmy."

Jimmy was dazed. He turned and plunged back toward the ship. Television! Across light-centuries! He'd seen Sally as she was at that instant.

The marvel of the vision overwhelmed the greater marvel of the working of a technical device after a thousand centuries. He was like a sleepwalker when he arrived at the ship and told the Skipper what he'd found.

The whole crew followed him back. Howell stood aside as they arrived. The Skipper tried it first, perching in the awkward, uncomfortable seat. The mists formed and cleared, and he looked—and the others looked with him—at the office of the spaceline which owned the *Carilya.* Men the others did not know moved and spoke to each other in the three-dimensional scene.

The Skipper gaped at them. The scene dissolved abruptly into another. A fat woman—the Skipper's wife—was cooking on an induction-heating stove. He gaped again, and the scene flickered and a child on fat, wobbly legs waddled in front of them, clutching a toy.

The Skipper got off the seat, blew his nose loudly.

"It works! That last was my grandson! Fat little beggar! Now, how in the world—"

But the others were clamoring crazily over the seat. It was extraordinary how every man ignored the technical aspects of the discovery in their hunger to make use of its human side. They had been seven weeks in space without news from home. They had expected to be forty-odd weeks more without communication. They ignored the wonder of the device and the greater wonder that it still functioned. They clamored to see their homes and their families as men hopelessly imprisoned might have desired to look in a crystal ball that actually worked.

All but Danton, and Howell. Howell stood back very quietly, watching the others. Danton hung back, biting his lips, his eyes like coals. Suddenly Howell returned to the ship.

At sundown the others trailed back to the *Carilya,* babbling to each other. Danton remained behind. An hour after sunset, the Skipper sent for him. The absence of dangerous intelligent beings on this planet was certain. But the lack of deadly carnivores was not so sure. Two oilers went after the engineer, armed and with lights.

They came back with Danton, and he had all the look of a madman. He was hoarse, as if he had been screaming curses. His eyes were bloodshot and glittering. There was foam on his lips. When the two oilers released him, he bolted into his cabin and

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locked himself in, muttering incoherencies in a rage-thickened voice.

Jimmy found Howell staring at the ceiling of their cabin. His expression was distinctly queer. Jimmy said breathlessly:

"I still can't believe it—television without a transmitter! And above light-speed! It's impossible—but it's true!"

"Maybe not," said Howell detachedly. "Maybe it's not impossible, that is. But it certainly isn't true!"

"What?" Jimmy could not believe his ears. "Not true? Did you try it?"

Howell nodded abstractedly. "That's why I say it isn't true. I thought of a sister of mine and there she was in that hollow space, going about her regular affairs in a perfectly normal fashion, in a room I remember to the last detail."

Jimmy was listening intently.

"The house she lived in," said Howell briefly," was to be torn down, last time I visited her. In fact, it was torn down before we lifted from Earth. But I've no idea what her new home looks like. So, subconsciously, I imagined her in a room I did know, and that's what I saw!"

JIMMY'S mouth dropped open. "You mean—that thing simply took pictures out of our heads and made them visible up in that shell space?"

"Yes," said Howell. "I thought of the World President, and there he was. But there wasn't any background. I don't know of any background for him—I've only seen him on vision-screens. There's no doubt about it, the thing simply takes pictures out of your head and makes them real and visible for others to see. They can probably be photographed, for that matter. But they wouldn't mean anything unless the person in the seat was, say, clairvoyant. Or unless he had precognition. Then they'd mean plenty!"

He lifted his head to look at Jimmy, then continued:

"A man with proved precognition—foresight—a gift of seeing the future—that gadget would make his powers available to his fellows. Once you proved someone reliably capable of seeing the future—which can be done—you'd have something. Maybe the Lost Race got that. Checks and counter-checks, of course, until they were sure they saw what was coming. . . ."

Jimmy sat down. It was his idea that when one thought, it was better not to have actual vision at a distance. There'd be no privacy.

"Even if you're right," he said, "the Space-Guard will go crazy! An artifact of the Lost Race; not only intact, but working!"

"The Space-Guard?" said Howell without intonation. "What do you think's happening to Danton? He stayed behind to look at images all by himself. He doesn't know that what he saw was his own imaginings only. He is insanely jealous. I think he saw his most abominable fears realized to the very last atom of horror. What will happen to him?"

It was not pleasant to think of. Jimmy lay awake for a long time. He did not like Danton. Sally had told him convincingly of the trick he'd used to get Jane to marry him. She was a fool to be taken in, perhaps; but she'd surely suffered enough for her folly. But Danton must be literally in hell. Everything he feared, and that which he tormented himself by suspecting, must have taken form under the metal hood, in color and in three dimensions and in lifesize. He must have seen himself mocked intolerably. . . .

With these thoughts whirling in his mind, sleep was a long time coming to Jimmy.

When morning came there was simply no question about what the crew of the *Carilya* would do. A first-landing had been required by the Space-Guard, and it was highly desirable as a break in the awful monotony of overdrive travel. But the discovery of a Lost Race artifact justified anything in the way of delay. The entire crew, all eight men, struggled back to the amphitheatre, carrying the equipment the Skipper had decided on. They set up a camera to photograph the images formed; other cameras to photograph every possible detail of the amphitheatre. Grubbing tools were used to clear away the vines.

It was an extraordinary scene. The weird, unearthlike vegetation; the curiously alien shell of deeply tarnished metal, with the queer-shaped seat before it, and eight men in spacecraft uniform staring at the image of the Skipper's grandchild waddling about and playing with blocks. He was actually on Earth, multiple millions of billions of miles away. But the camera purred, taking his picture.

As the men stared in rapt concentration, there came a racking, muffled *Boom!* a mile away. Then the eerie, lunatic whistling of a

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lifeboat screaming for the sky.

The eight of them gasped. Instinctively, every man counted all the others. But they were all on hand. Then they ran for the *Carilya,* forgetting the cameras and the hood itself.

The airlock door was open. Smoke welled out. A lifeboat blister gaped wide and it was empty. The fought their way into the stifling vapor. It was thickest toward the engineroom. The Skipper himself was first into the compartment which was the heart of the ship.

And the ship's engines were so much wreckage. The *Carilya* would never lift from this unnamed planet without new engines. And the fuel container gaped wide. The bessendium fuel had vanished. No man was missing. Every one was still at hand. Only a lifeboat was gone—a lifeboat and the unthinkably precious fuel-block. No food, no stores taken. Nothing else.

THE SKIPPER'S face went gray. A thing exactly like this had not happened before, perhaps, but disasters enough like it were nightmares to spacemen. The *Carilya* was now missing. Permanently. She would never be searched for. It was not practical. No other ship would touch on this planet for a thousand years. The crew of the *Carilya* was marooned in absolute helplessness, literally until it rotted.

"It looks as if we found more than a relic of the Lost Race," the Skipper said hoarsely. "It looks as if a survivor of the Lost Race found us! And he—it—took our fuel and smashed our engines and went off in a lifeboat. Crazy! A lifeboat can't use bessendium! And its drive is good for half a light-year or less!"

"But there are other planets," Howell said. "Or maybe there's a colony of survivors somewhere else on this world." Then, to Jimmy, he said wryly, "Maybe one of them with precognition foresaw our arrival, and they made plans ahead of time!"

But something stuck absurdly in Jimmy's mind. He said bewilderedly:

"But look—that smoke was nitriol! Human explosive! Our stuff! An intelligent creature might work out a drive and the controls of a lifeboat blister and a lifeboat itself, from inspection. That's physics. But how'd he know what was explosive? That's chemistry. How could he know it was an explosive without analyzing it?"

Howell jumped. Jimmy started blindly forward to talk to the Skipper. But Howell caught his arm and drew him back.

"Wait!" he said fiercely. "Hold it! You've said something!"

The Skipper was organizing for an unheard-of emergency, giving hasty orders. A guard at the airlock. Hunting parties of two each, to comb the area immediately around the ship for signs of intelligent life. They would carry walkie-talkies for reporting. Meanwhile, break out cargo and search for weapons and anything else the situation required.

Howell and Jimmy made one of the two hunting pairs. They went cautiously away from the ship. Then Howell said roughly:

"We're going back to that hood! The cameras are still running. We'll turn them off, and arrange things."

Jimmy was beginning to see the situation as it affected all of them: Marooned for all time—with a ship for shelter, and stores, and a full cargo of supplies for a Space-Guard base, but utterly without hope of ever leaving. He'd never see Sally again. She'd never know what had happened to him. She'd imagine the *Carilya* disabled and floating helplessly until her crew starved or suffocated—

Howell led the way directly to the shell in which the images formed. He turned off the cameras—but hid two of them and triggered them to the vines by the seat in front of the shell.

"I've got a hunch," he said grimly, "which does *not* come from the subconscious! I think you're right about that explosion. After all, any of us could have set a time bomb to wreck the engines, and any of us could have set time controls to open the blister and send the lifeboat off untenanted."

"But—he'd be marooned with the rest," protested Jimmy. "And what would he gain?"

"Five pounds of bessendium," said Howell. "Forty million credits, salable in the black market anywhere. And if he is a certain sort of man—other satisfactions."

Howell's face was savagely stern. He replaced the vines so they would not seem to have been disturbed. But the cameras would photograph any images formed in the metal shell.

They went on, and faithfully searched for signs of alien, intelligent beings. They found nothing. Strange enough creatures, to be

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sure. They saw flightless birds—at least, they had feathers—with teeth, and once they saw what looked like a tiny lizard spinning a webb of sticky stuff; and once they passed a hole in the ground, two inches across, from which shrill singing of a birdlike quality issued. But there was no sign of intelligent life anywhere.

BACK at the ship there was feverish activity. They were dead men, all eight of them, was the general consensus. Perhaps in a thousand years a ship might descend on this planet. It might or might not find the corroded remains of the *Carilya*. But they were dead to all the rest of humanity. They might as well be dead physically.

It seemed absurd to be mounting blasters to defend the *Carilya* against the fellows of the assumed Lost Race creature which had smashed the ship's engines and gone off in a lifeboat. Each crew member had the look of a newly-condemned criminal. But each one differed in his reaction. Danton looked like a madman, with raging eyes. But all worked with desperate haste.

The other searching party found no sign of intelligent life, either. Toward sunset, two more searching parties went out. Danton was in one of them. Jimmy was called on to help the Skipper check over the ship's manifest for useful articles. With a certain irony, he pointed to the notation of a needle-boat carried in the *Carilya's* hold for the base on Cetis Alpha Two. The Skipper nodded gloomily.

"An explorer craft," he said wearily. "The Guard's trying to find unsmashed traces of the Lost Race. They're shorthanded, because Guard pay is low. So they're going in for two-man ships. If they don't go crazy, two men can map a star cluster as well as a cruiser's forty. If we had our fuel, we could get back to earth in that needle-boat."

But the fuel was gone. Jimmy and the Skipper went on with their work, picking out cases to be opened. They worked until exhaustion stopped them.

Jimmy had just reached his cabin when Howell turned up, smelling of crushed jungle growth. He was deathly pale. He had the rolls of film from the cameras.

"They turned on," he said harshly, "and I've got the film. But you're not going to look, Jimmy. *I* look first!"

He threaded the film in the viewer and turned it so that Jimmy could not see. Then there was silence. For fifteen minutes or more Howell watched, and a deadly fury filled his face. It was a cold and horrible rage. Then he pulled out the film and deliberately touched a match to it. It shriveled, smoked, and fell to ash. Then he sat still, his lips tautened to a thin line. At long last he stood up.

"Danton used the gadget again, to see what he thought his wife was doing," he said tonelessly. "And I've just looked into his mind. If you ever get a chance to do that, Jimmy—don't!" He paused, then added evenly, "Apparently there are two things intelligent people shouldn't do: they shouldn't look into the future, and they shouldn't look into each other's minds."

He went out. Jimmy tried desperately not to think of the fact that he would never see Sally again. He was very glad that he'd kept busy so that now he was exhausted. He fell asleep.

When he reported for duty next morning, the Skipper seemed strangely abstracted and uneasy. He said shortly:

"Howell sprang a queer theory on me just now." A pause, then, "How's his stability? You share a cabin with him. Is he overimaginative?"

"I don't think he deludes himself," said Jimmy, his voice tired. He'd waked without any feeling of having rested. All night he had dreamed of Sally. In the dream, she'd given up hope of ever seeing him again, and she was crying. And he had been unable to speak to her or comfort her.

"I'm going to send the remaining lifeboat off on an aerial search," said the Skipper slowly. "Howell suggested it—and he may be right. And we're going to make a more thorough search in the jungle around here. I'll leave Danton as ship-guard, and the rest of us will search the jungle with a fine-tooth comb."

JIMMY was apathetic. Despair had settled on him. There was no conceivable hope. The *Carilya* was a wreck and she would never lift again, and there was no fuel and none could be improvised, and there were no engines. And there was not the faintest chance of any other vessel coming this way, or of landing on this planet if it did; and even then, with tens of millions of square miles of surface—

The rest of the crew members were as

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numbed as he was. The remaining lifeboat took off and went away across the jungle. There were three men in it. Four more, including Howell and Jimmy, marched away with the Skipper to search in the jungle. Danton stayed behind as ship-guard, with orders to send up sound bombs in case of any alarm. But the men on foot did not go far. Once out of sight of the ship, the Skipper halted them.

"I'm taking Howell's word for something," he said heavily. "We're going to a spot where we can watch the ship from a hiding place."

"I'm sure of part of it," Howell said. "I think the rest, psychologically, is pretty certain."

He led the way in a long circuit. They came to the back of the hillock which had shielded the amphitheatre and the metal shell from the blasts which destroyed the city. The lifeboat had landed there and the three men were waiting. All seven climbed the hillock's far side. Presently they could see the *Carilya* between the canes of giant grass which covered the hill.

They waited, watching. Around them, the unfamiliar cries of living things filled the air. Wind whispered among the huge grass blades overhead.

Howell said in a low tone to Jimmy, "Danton used the gadget to see what his wife was doing. He saw his own imaginings only, but he didn't know it. He thought—still thinks!—they were real! So he's a crazy man. He simply can't face the prospect of spending a year on the way to Cetis Alpha, imagining her acting as he thinks is now proved. He's got to get back to Earth and kill her! For him there's no alternative!

"But—remember, I said Genghis Khan built a pyramid of skulls? Danton's got to do that. He's got to boast. So, I think we'll be called back presently. Also, he'll have prepared an escape after he kills her, so he can gloat over it afterward." His face took on a faraway look. "It's bad business, Jimmy, to coddle oneself by indulging in hate. I've done it, and it's bad!"

There was a stirring. A man pointed, startled.

Down below and far away, a great cargo panel opened in the *Carilya's* side. Danton had opened it. Then objects came tumbling out. The cargo unloader was pushing them. The Skipper winced as cases crashed open. Then a long, sharp nose poked out. The needle-ship which was part of the *Carilya's* cargo thrust out its bow, and then trundled down the slanting cargo panel to the ground. It was in the open air.

Bewildered babblings up on the hill. Sudden, hopeless hope—

"Stay here!" ordered the Skipper harshly. But he turned a tortured face to Howell. "You're sure?"

"I'm positive!" said Howell steadily.

Danton appeared, a minute figure. He opened the port of the needle-boat and entered, and came out again and went back to the *Carilya*. He returned to the needle-boat. After a moment there was the muffled, droning thunder of a bessendium-fuel drive in test operation.

Cries broke from the throats of the men on the hill. They would have plunged toward the ship had not the Skipper restrained them. His face was bitter and angry.

"You're right, Howell!" he snapped. "Now what?"

"The sound bombs, I think," said Howell quietly. "He can't help boasting to us before he leaves. I doubt he intends to kill any of us, though. He'd prefer to leave us alive to hate him: that would be a tribute to his power!"

THE DRONING stopped. Danton moved about. Then there was a small report, and something hurtled skyward and burst with a terrific detonation in midair. Two others followed. Sound bombs—the recall.

The Skipper led the way down hill. But the crewmen could not keep discipline. An oiler ran ahead, babbling. Then there was a stampede. Only the Skipper, Howell and Jimmy descended with dignity.

When they reached the ship, Danton stood in the port of the needle-boat, snarling triumphantly at his former comrades. He had a blaster bearing upon them. They pleaded abjectly to be allowed on board.

His face contorted when he saw Howell and Jimmy.

"I wanted to tell you, Howell," he cried hoarsely. "I'm going back to Earth! I took the fuel and sent off a lifeboat, to get my chance. And I've got it! That thing you found—it showed me what Jane's been doing—"

He seemed suddenly to go berserk, snarling unspeakable things. Howell watched him.

"I'll land without notice," raved Danton.

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"I'll get to Jane when she doesn't expect it, and I'll blast anybody she's got with her, and then I'll take her away! I'll take her off to space in this ship, and I'll kill her! But not too fast. I'll keep her strong with stimulants, and I'll kill her slowly and she'll take a month to die! And you can picture that while you're rotting here!"

But Howell shook his head, smiling without mirth. He spoke evenly:

"Oh, no! The thing I found doesn't show what's happening back on Earth. It shows only what's happening in your own mind, Danton. And I got pictures of that last night, when you went back and looked at your own imaginings for the second time. I got pictures of the needle-boat, too, when you thought you were inspecting it with that same gadget—and of where you'd hidden the bessendium when you thought you made sure it hadn't been disturbed! You're not going to do anything you plan, Danton! You can't take off. I've fixed the controls so you can test-run the engines, but you can't put on the power. I've even—"

Danton was taken aback for an instant. Then he shrieked with fury. The blaster in his hand came up, aimed at Howell. At that distance it would wipe out the Skipper and Jimmy, too. The Skipper fired first, and Danton seemed to be all flame. And then Howell said mildly:

"You didn't need to do that, Skipper. I'd switched blasters on him. His wouldn't have fired. But it may be just as well. . . ."

THE NEEDLE-BOAT took off two days later, duly freighted with adequate photographs of the Lost Race artifact, of the *Carilya,* of her engine room, and sworn visi-records of the situation and its origin.

The Skipper stayed with his ship, because of course there would be another ship coming out now with new engines. Four crew members stayed with him too. They had no objection to a vacation with pay, now that rescue was certain. Only Howell and Jimmy went back in the needle-boat.

In overdrive, headed back, Howell was very quiet. But Jimmy babbled happily. On landing, he'd be able to get married and have six months ashore before he needed to ship out again. He was on top of the world, even light-years away from it.

Howell listened patiently enough. But the day before they cut overdrive and saw the stars again, he said:

"I, too, have plans, Jimmy. But you should know what I learned about the Lost Race. Clearing brush away to take those last pictures, I found a skeleton of one of them. Here's a picture of it."

Jimmy looked. Mere traces of bones, in a sense, yet fully recognizable. There were rust streaks, too, of metal objects the member of the Lost Race had had about him when he died.

"Definitely anthropoid," said Howell, drily. "But he had a tail. And he was plenty civilized! You can't tell much about the skull, because apparently he blew his head off after the city was smashed and found he was the only member of his race left."

Jimmy continued to inspect the picture. It was magnificent, of course, to have found not only an artifact but a skeleton of one of the Lost Race. But he was much more concerned about his own romance. Howell, smiling, looked at him and said:

"They made a wonderful civilization over an area two thousand light-years across. Then they made a gadget that would show, unmistakably, the things one's brain contains. If they put somebody with well-developed precognition in the seat we saw, they could see the future. They did. What they saw made them smash their civilization and commit suicide. Remember?"

"Sure!" Jimmy said. "I remember that was your new theory."

"Now I've got evidence for it," Howell said. "I guessed that they found out their atomic power had changed their race, in such a manner that their descendents would be monsters. They killed themselves rather than face it, and smashed their civilization so no later race would suffer the same fate. Look at this skeleton. What do you see?"

Jimmy blinked. So Howell said patiently:

"Remember that mutations, even from radioactivity, are of individual points from mutated individual genes. Now mutate a few familiar features of that skeleton. Make the tail into a coccyx. Shorten the arm bones and shift the hip sockets so the creature would walk upright. Those are relatively mild changes. There must have been others we can't tell from a skeleton alone. But those would be enough to make a chap like this see descendents so changed as monsters.

"And he'd rather die, and his whole race preferred to die, rather than live to see their descendents become such ghastly creatures as—" Howell smiled faintly "—as men!"

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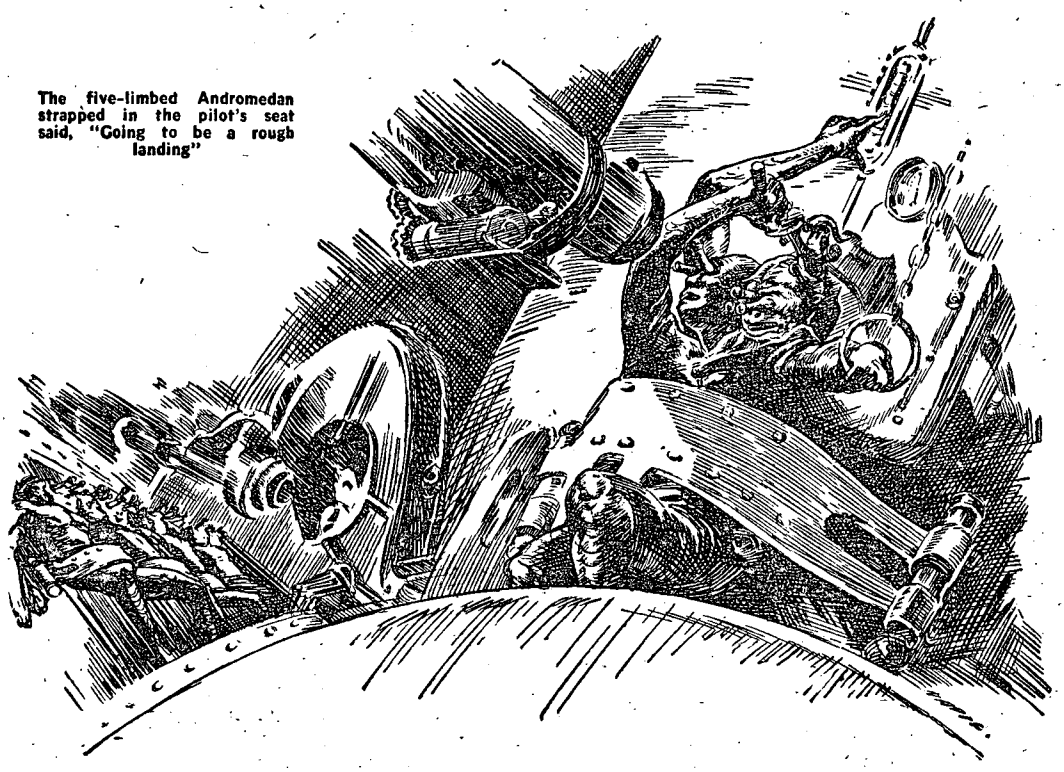

The five-limbed Andromedan strapped in the pilot's seat said, "Going to be a rough landing"

*Now is the time for—*

# ALL GOOD BEMS

## *—to come to the aid of an author!*

*THE spaceship from Andromeda II spun like a top in the grip of mighty forces. The five-limbed Andromedan strapped into the pilot's seat turned the three protuberant eyes of one of his heads toward the four other Andromedans strapped into bunks around the ship. "Going to be a rough landing," he said. It was.*

ELMO SCOTT hit the tab key of his typewriter and listened to the carriage zing across and ring the bell. It sounded nice and he did it again. But there still weren't any words on the sheet of paper in the machine.

He lit another cigarette and stared at it. At the paper, that is, not the cigarette. There still weren't any words on the paper.

He tilted his chair back and turned to look at the sleek black-and-tan Doberman pinscher lying in the mathematical middle of the rag rug. He said, "You lucky dog." The Doberman wagged what little stump of tail he had. He didn't answer otherwise.

Elmo Scott looked back at the paper. There still weren't any words there. He put his fingers over the keyboard and wrote:

By FREDRIC BROWN



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"Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party." He stared at the words, such as they were, and felt the faintest breath of an idea brush his cheek.

He called out "Toots!" and a cute little brunette in a blue gingham house dress came out of the kitchen and stood by him. His arm went around her. He said, "I got an idea."

She read the words in the typewriter. "It's the best thing you've wirtten in three days," she said, "except for that letter renewing your subscription to the Digest. I think that was better."

"Button your lip," Elmo told her. "I'm talking about what I'm going to do with that sentence. I'm going to change it to a science-fiction plot idea, one word at a time. It can't miss. Watch."

He took his arm from around her and wrote under the first sentence: "Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of the party." He said, "Get the idea, Toots? Already it's beginning to look like a science-fiction sendoff. Good old bug-eyed monsters. Bems to you. Watch the next step."

UNDER the first sentence and the second he wrote: "Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of—" He stared at it. "What shall I make it, Toots? 'The galaxy' or 'the universe'?"

"Better make it yourself. If you don't get a story finished and the check for it in two weeks, we lose this cabin and walk back to the city and—and you'll have to quit writing full time and go back to the newspaper and—"

"Cut it out, Toots. I know all that. Too well."

"Just the same, Elmo, you'd better make it: 'Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of Elmo Scott.'"

The big Doberman stirred on the rag rug. He said, "You needn't."

Both human heads turned toward him.

The little brunette stamped a dainty foot. "Elmo!" she said. "Trying a trick like that. That's how you've been spending the time you should have spent writing. Learning ventriloquism!"

"No, Toots," said the dog. "It isn't that."

"Elmo! How do you get him to move his mouth like—" Her eyes went from the dog's face to Elmo's and she stopped in mid-sentence. If Elmo Scott wasn't scared stiff, then he was a better actor than Maurice Evans. She said, "Elmo!" again, but this time her voice was a scared little wail, and she didn't stamp her foot. Instead she practically fell into Elmo's lap and, if he hadn't grabbed her, would probably have fallen from there to the floor.

"Don't be frightened, Toots," said the dog.

Some degree of sanity returned to Elmo Scott. He said, "Whatever you are, don't call my wife Toots. Her name is Dorothy."

"You call her Toots."

"That's—that's different."

"I see it is," said the dog. His mouth lolled open as though he were laughing. "The concept that entered your mind when you used that word 'wife' is an interesting one. This is a bi-sexual planet, then."

Elmo said, "This is a—uh— What are you talking about?"

"On Andromeda II," said the dog, "we have five sexes. But we are a highly developed race, of course. Yours is highly primitive. Perhaps I should say lowly primitive. Your language has, I find, confusing connotations; it is not mathematical. But, as I started to observe, you are still in the bi-sexual stage. How long since you were mono-sexual? And don't deny that you once were; I can read the word 'amoeba' in your mind."

"If you can read my mind," said Elmo, "why should I talk?"

"Consider Toots—I mean Dorothy," said the dog. "We cannot hold a three-way conversation since you two are not telepathic. At any rate, there shall shortly be more of us in the conversation. I have summoned my companions." He laughed again. "Do not let them frighten you, no matter in what form they may appear. They are merely Bems."

"B-bems?" asked Dorothy. "You mean you are b-bug-eyed monsters? That's what Elmo means by Bems, but you aren't—"

"That is just what I am," said the dog. "You are not, of course, seeing the real me. Nor will you see my companions as they really are. They, like me, are temporarily animating bodies of creatures of lesser intelligence. In our real bodies, I assure you, you would classify us as Bems. We have five limbs each and two heads, each head with three eyes on stalks."

"Where are your real bodies?" Elmo asked.

"They are dead— Wait, I see that word

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means more to you than I at first thought. They are dormant, temporarily uninhabitable and in need of repairs, inside the fused hull of a spaceship which was warped into this space too near a planet. This planet. That's what wrecked us."

"Where? You mean there's really a spaceship near here? Where?" Elmo's eyes were almost popping from his head as he questioned the dog.

"That is none of your business, Earthman. If it were found and examined by you creatures, you would possibly discover space travel before you are ready for it. The cosmic scheme would be upset." He growled. "There are enough cosmic wars now. We were fleeing a Betelgeuse fleet when we warped into your space."

"Elmo," said Dorothy. "What's beetle juice got to do with it? Wasn't this crazy enough before he started talking about a beetle juice fleet?"

"No," said Elmo resignedly. "It wasn't." For a squirrel had just pushed its way through the hole in the bottom of the screen door.

It said, "Hyah dar, yo-all. We-uns got yo message, One."

"See what I mean?" said Elmo.

"Everything is all right, Four," said the Doberman. "These people will serve our purpose admirably. Meet Elmo Scott and Dorothy Scott; don't call her Toots."

"Yessir. Yessum. Ah's sho gladda meetcha."

The Doberman's mouth lolled open again in another laugh; it was unmistakable this time.

"Perhaps I'd better explain Four's accent," he said. "We scattered, each entering a creature of low mentality and from that vantage point contacting the mind of some member of the ruling species, learning from that mind the language and the level of intelligence and degree of imagination. I take it from your reaction that Four has learned the language from a mind which speaks a language differing slightly from yours."

"Ah sho did," said the squirrel.

ELMO shuddered slightly. "Not that I'm suggesting it, but I'm curious to know why you didn't simply take over the higher species directly," he said.

The dog looked shocked. It was the first time Elmo had ever seen a dog look shocked, but the Doberman managed it.

"It would be unthinkable," he declared. "The cosmic ethic forbids the taking over of any creature of an intelligence over the four level. We Andromedans are of the twenty-three level, and I find you Earthlings—"

"Wait!" said Elmo. "Don't tell me. It might give me an inferiority complex. Or would it?"

"Ah fears it might," said the squirrel.

The Doberman said, "So you can see that it is not purely coincidence that we Bems should manifest ourselves to you who are a writer of what I see you call science-fiction. We studied many minds and yours was the first one we found capable of accepting the premise of visitors from Andromeda. Had Four here, for example, tried to explain things to the woman whose mind he studied, she would probably have gone insane."

"She sho would," said the squirrel.

A chicken thrust its head through the hole in the screen, clucked, and pulled its head out again.

"Please let Three in," said the Doberman. "I fear that you will not be able to communicate directly with Three. He has found that subjectively to modify the throat structure of the creature he inhabits in order to enable it to talk, would be a quite involved process. It does not matter. He can communicate telepathically with one of us, and we can relay his comments to you. At the moment he sends you his greetings and asks that you open the door."

The clucking of the chicken (it was a big black hen, Elmo saw) sounded angry and Elmo said, "Better open the door, Toots."

Dorothy Scott got off his lap and opened the door. She turned a dismayed face to Elmo and then to the Doberman.

"There's a cow coming down the road," she said. "Do you mean to tell me that she—"

"He," the Doberman corrected her. "Yes, that will be Two. And since your language is completely inadequate, in that it has only two genders, you may as well call all of us 'he'; it will save trouble. Of course, we are five different sexes, as I explained."

"You didn't explain," said Elmo, looking interested.

Dorothy glowered at Elmo. "He'd better not. Five different sexes! All living together in one spaceship. I suppose it takes all five of you to—uh—"

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"Exactly," said the Doberman. "And now if you will please open the door for Two, I'm sure that—"

"I will not! Have a cow in here! Do you think I'm crazy?"

"We could make you so," said the dog.

Elmo looked from the dog to his wife. "You'd better open the door, Dorothy," he advised.

"Excellent advice," said the Doberman. "We are not, incidentally, going to impose on your hospitality, nor will we ask you to do anything unreasonable."

Dorothy opened the screen door and the cow clumped in.

He looked at Elmo and said, "Hi, Mac. What's cookin'?"

Elmo closed his eyes.

The Doberman asked the cow, "Where's Five? Have you been in touch with him?"

"Yeah," said the cow. "He's comin'. The guy I looked over was a bindle-stiff, One. What are these mugs?"

"The one with the pants is a writer," said the dog. "The one with the skirt is his wife."

"What's a wife?" asked the cow. He looked at Dorothy and leered. "I like skirts better," he said. "Hiya, Babe."

Elmo got up out of his chair, glaring at the cow. "Listen, you—" That was as far as he got. He dissolved into laughter, almost hysterical laughter, and sank down into the chair again.

Dorothy looked at him indignantly. "Elmo! Are you going to let a cow—"

She almost strangled on the word as she caught Elmo's eye, and she, too, started laughing. She fell into Elmo's lap so hard that he grunted.

The Doberman was laughing, too, his long pink tongue lolling out. "I'm glad you people have a sense of humor," he said with approval. "In fact, that is one reason we chose you. But let us be serious a moment."

There wasn't any laughter in his voice now. He said, "Neither of you will be harmed, but you will be watched," he told them. "Do not go near the phone or leave the house while we are here. Is that understood?"

"How long are you going to be here?" Elmo asked. "We have food for only a few days."

"That will be long enough. We will be able to make a new spaceship within a matter of hours. I see that that amazes you; I shall explain that we can work in a slower dimension."

"I see," said Elmo.

"What is he talking about, Elmo?" Dorothy demanded.

"A slower dimension," said Elmo. "I used it in a story once myself. You go into another dimension where the time rate is different; spend a month there and come back and you get back only a few minutes or hours after you left, by time in your own dimension."

"And you invented it? Elmo, how wonderful!"

Elmo grinned at the Doberman. He said, "That's all you want—to let you stay here until you get your new ship built? And to let you alone and not notify anybody that you're here?"

"Exactly." The dog appeared to beam with delight. "And we will not inconvenience you unnecessarily. But you will be guarded. Five or I will do that."

"Five? What is he?"

"Don't be alarmed; he is under your chair at the moment, but he will not harm you. You didn't see him come in a moment ago through the hole in the screen. Five, meet Elmo and Dorothy Scott. Don't call her Toots."

THERE was a rattle under the chair. Dorothy screamed and pulled her feet up into Elmo's lap. Elmo tried to put his there too, with confusing results.

There was hissing laughter from under the chair. A sibilant voice said, "Don't worry, folks. I didn't know until I read it in your minds just now that shaking my tail like that was a warning that I was about to— Think of the word for me—thank you. To strike." A five-foot-long rattlesnake crawled out from under the chair and curled up beside the Doberman.

"Five won't harm you," said the Doberman. "None of us will."

"We sho won't," said the squirrel.

The cow leaned against the wall, crossed its front legs and said, "That's right, Mac." He, or she, or it leered at Dorothy. It said, "An' Babe, you don't need ta worry about what you're worryin' about. I'm housebroke." It started to chew placidly and then stopped. "I won't give you no udder trouble, either," it concluded.

Elmo Scott shuddered slightly.

"You've done worse than that yourself."

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said the Doberman. "And it's quite a trick to pun in a language you've just learned. I can see one question in your mind. You're wondering that creatures of high intelligence should have a sense of humor. The answer is obvious if you think about it; isn't your sense of humor more highly developed than that of creatures who have even less intelligence than you?"

"Yes," Elmo admitted. "Say, I just thought of something else. Andromeda is a constellation, not a star. Yet you said your planet is Andromeda II. How come?"

"Actually we come from a planet of a star in Andromeda for which you have no name; it's too distant to show up in your telescopes. I merely called it by a name that would be familiar to you. For your convenience I named the star after the constellation."

Whatever slight suspicion (of what, he didn't know) Elmo Scott may have had, evaporated.

The cow uncrossed its legs. "What t'ell we waitin' for?" it inquired.

"Nothing, I suppose," said the Doberman. "Five and I will take turns standing guard."

"Go ahead and get started," said the rattlesnake. "I'll take the first trick. Half an hour; that'll give you a month there."

The Doberman nodded. He got up and trotted to the screen door, pushing it open with his muzzle after lifting the latch with his tail. The squirrel, the chicken and the cow followed.

"Be seein' ya, Babe," said the cow.

"We sho will," the squirrel said.

It was almost two hours later that the Doberman, who was then on duty as guard, lifted his head suddenly.

"There they went," he said.

"I beg your pardon," said Elmo Scott.

"Their new spaceship just took off. It has warped out of this space and is heading back toward Andromeda."

"You say *their*. Didn't you go along?"

"Me? Of course not. I'm Rex, your dog. Remember? Only One, who was using my body, left me with an understanding of what happened and a low level of intelligence."

"A low level?"

"About equal to yours, Elmo. He says it will pass away, but not until after I've explained everything to you. But how about some dog food. I'm hungry. Will you get me some, Toots?"

Elmo said, "Don't call my wife— Say, are you really Rex?"

"Of course I'm Rex."

"Get him some dog food, Toots," Elmo said. "I've got an idea. Let's all go out in the kitchen so we can keep talking."

"Can I have two cans of it?" asked the Doberman.

Dorothy was getting them out of the closet. "Sure, Rex," she said.

The Doberman lay down in the doorway. "How about rustling some grub for us, too, Toots?" Elmo suggested. "I'm hungry. Look, Rex, you mean they just went off like that without saying good-by to us, or anything?"

"They left me to say good-by. And they did you a favor, Elmo, to repay you for your hospitality. One took a look inside that skull of yours and found the psychological block that's been keeping you from thinking of plots for your stories. He removed it. You'll be able to write again. No better than before, maybe, but at least you won't go snow-blind staring at blank paper."

"The devil with that," said Elmo. "How about the spaceship they didn't repair? Did they leave it?"

"Sure. But they took their bodies out of it and fixed them up. They were really Bems, by the way. Two heads apiece, five limbs—and they could use all five as either arms or legs—six eyes apiece, three to a head, on long stems. You should have seen them."

DOROTHY was putting cold food on the table. "You won't mind a cold lunch, will you, Elmo?" she asked.

Elmo looked at her without seeing her and said, "Huh?" and then turned back to the Doberman. The Doberman got up from the doorway and went over to the big dish of dog food that Dorothy had just put down on the floor. He said, "Thanks, Toots," and started eating in noisy gulps.

Elmo made himself a sandwich, and started munching it. The Doberman finished his meal, lapped up some water and went back to the throw rug in the doorway.

Elmo stared at him. "Rex, if I can find that spaceship they abandoned, I won't *have* to write stories," he said. "I can find enough things in it to— Say, I'll make you a proposition."

"Sure," said the Doberman, "if I tell you where it is, you'll get another Doberman pinscher to keep me company, and you'll

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raise Doberman pups. Well, you don't know it yet, but you're going to do that anyway. The Bem named One planted the idea in your mind; he said I ought to get something out of this, too."

"Okay, but will you tell me what it is?"

"Sure, now that you've finished that sandwich. It was something that would have looked like a dust mote, if you'd seen it, on the top slice of boiled ham. It was almost sub-microscopic. You just ate it."

Elmo Scott put his hands to his head. The Doberman's mouth was open; its tongue lolled out for all the world as though it were laughing at him.

Elmo pointed a finger at him. He said, "You mean I've got to write for a living all the rest of my life?"

"Why not?" asked the Doberman. "They figured you'd be really happier that way. And with the psychological block removed, it won't be so hard. You won't have to start out, 'Now is the time for all good men—' And, incidentally, it wasn't any coincidence that you substituted Bems for men; that was One's idea. He was already here inside me, watching you. And getting quite a kick out of it."

Elmo got up and started to pace back and forth. "Looks like they outsmarted me at every turn but one, Rex," he murmured. "I've got 'em there, if you'll co-operate."

"How?"

"We can make a fortune with you. The world's only talking dog. Rex, we'll get you diamond-studded collars and feed you aged steaks and—and get everything you want. Will you?"

"Will I what?"

"Speak."

"Woof," said the Doberman.

Dorothy Scott looked at Elmo Scott. "Why do that, Elmo?" she asked. "You told me I should never ask him to speak unless we had something to give him, and he's just eaten."

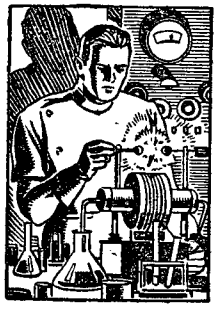
"I dunno," said Elmo. "I forgot. Well, guess I'd better get back to getting a story started." He stepped over the dog and walked to his typewriter in the other room.

He sat down in front of it and then called out, "Hey, Toots," and Dorothy came in and stood beside him. He said, "I think I got an idea. That 'Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of Elmo Scott' has the gem of an idea in it. I can even pick the title out of it. 'All Good Bems' About a guy trying to write a science-fiction story, and suddenly his—uh—dog I can make him a Doberman like Rex Well, wait till you read it."

He jerked fresh paper into the typewriter and wrote the heading:

ALL GOOD BEMS

## Whatsa Matter?



FOR some time now two theories of matter have been used by advanced scientists to explain the phenomena they were studying. One theory, which was named for the English physicist who evolved it, Dr. P. A. M. Dirac, stated that the actions of electrons could be accounted for by considering them as fixed points.

The other and older theory, brought forward in the nineteenth century by another British physicist, Dr. Clark Maxwell, believed that electrons were actually waves and that these waves accounted for all matter, from solids to such comparative intangibles as light and radio.

Each theory worked satisfactorily in its own field and, for many decades, never the twain did meet. However, Dr. Julian Schwinger of Harvard recently discovered that the Dirac theory fails to hold water when electrons, treated as fixed points, are placed in an electromagnetic field. However, by revoking the Dirac theory mathematically, Dr. Schwinger has been able to salvage much of it while accounting for the deviations of the fixed-point electron under conditions usually ascribed to the Maxwell experiments.

A really satisfactory theory which will account for the behavior of electrons under all conditions is something that is still unsolved, according to Dr. Schwinger. But science is slowly working toward a final answer which, when found, will help solve many present-day mysteries of the universe.

*—Carter Sprague*

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WHEN Meister got out of bed that Tuesday morning, he thought that it was before dawn. He rarely needed an alarm clock these days—a little light in his eyes was enough to awaken him and sometimes his dreams brought him upright long before the sun came up.

It had seemed a reasonably dreamless night, but probably he had just forgotten the dreams. Anyhow, here he was, awake early. He padded over to the window, shut it, pulled up the shade and looked out.

The street lights were not off yet, but the sky was already a smooth, dark gray. Meister had never before seen such a sky. Even the dullest overcast before a snowfall shows some variation in brightness. The sky here—what he could see of it between the apartment house—was like the inside of a lead helmet.

He shrugged and turned away, picking the clock up from the table to turn off the alarm. Some day, he promised himself, he would sleep long enough to hear it ring. That would be a good day; it would mean that the dreams were gone. In Concentration Camp Dora, one had awakened the moment the tunnel lights were put on; otherwise, one might be beaten awake, or dead. Meister was deaf in the left ear on that account. For the first three days at Dora he had had to be awakened.

He became aware suddenly that he was staring fixedly at the face of the clock, his subconscious ringing alarm bells of its own. *Nine o'clock!* No, it was not possible. It was obviously close to sunrise. He shook the clock stupidly, although it was ticking and had been since he first noticed it. Tentatively he touched the keys at the back.

The alarm had run down.

# THE

JAMES

**Scientists Race With Death to Dispel the**



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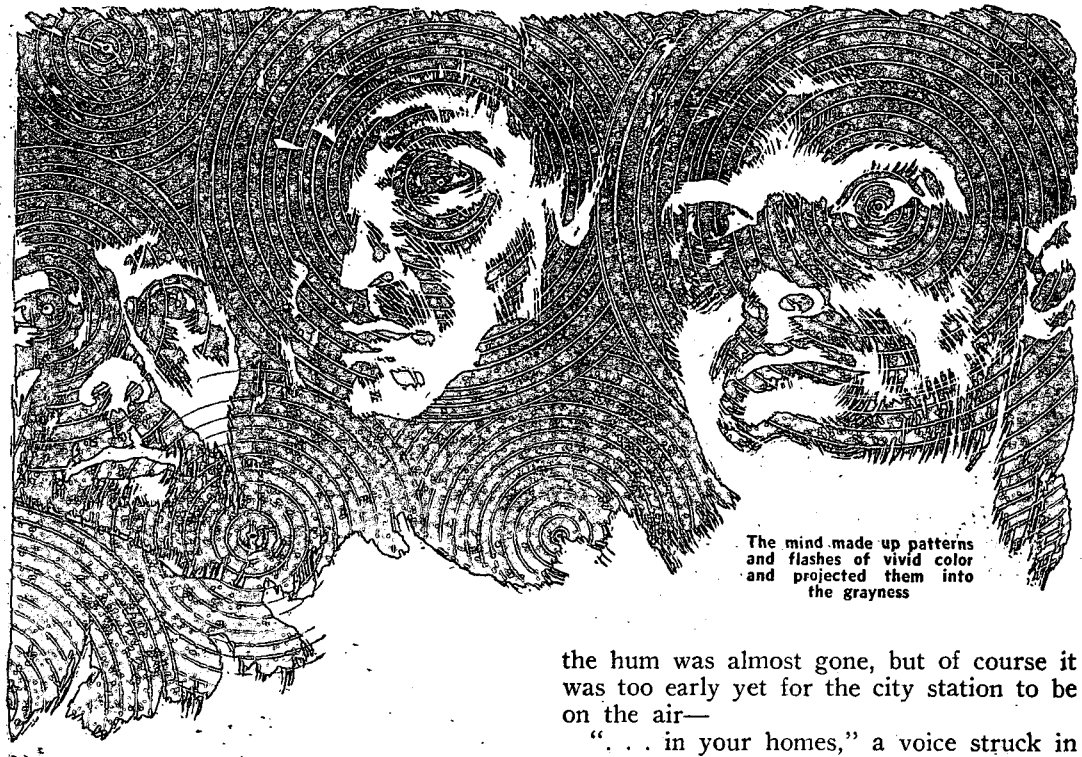

The mind made up patterns and flashes of vivid color and projected them into the grayness

This was obviously ridiculous. The clock was wrong. He put it back on the table and turned on the little radio. After a moment it responded with a terrific thrumming, as if

BOX

BLISH

a vacuum cleaner were imprisoned in its workings.

"B-flat," Meister thought automatically. He had only one good ear, but he still had perfect pitch—a necessity for a resonance engineer. He shifted the setting. The hum got louder. Hastily he reversed the dial. Around 830 Kc, where WNYC came in, the hum was almost gone, but of course it was too early yet for the city station to be on the air—

". . . in your homes," a voice struck in clearly above the humming. "We are awaiting a report from Army headquarters. In the meantime, any crowding at the boundaries of the barrier will interrupt the work of the Mayor's inquiry commission . . . Here's a word just in from the Port Authority: all ferry service has been suspended until further notice. Subways and tubes are running outbound trains only; however, local service remains about normal so far."

Barrier? Meister went to the window again and looked out. The radio voice continued:

"NBC at Radio City disclaims all knowledge of the persistent signal which has blotted out radio programs from nine hundred kilocycles on up since midnight last night. This completes the roster of broadcasting stations in the city proper. It is believed that the tone is associated with the current wall around Manhattan and most of the other boroughs. Some outside stations are still getting through, but at less than a fiftieth of their normal input." The voice went on:

"At Columbia University, the dean of the



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Physics Department estimates that about the same proportion of sunlight is also getting through. We do not yet have any report about the passage of air through the barrier. The flow of water in the portions of the East and Hudson Rivers which lie under the screen is said to be normal, and no abnormalities are evident at the Whitehall Street tidal station."

There was a pause; the humming went on unabated. Then there was a sharp *beep!* and the voice said, "At the signal—nine A.M., Eastern Summer Time."

Meister left the radio on while he dressed. The alarming pronouncements kept on, but he was not yet thoroughly disturbed, except for Ellen. She might be frightened; but probably nothing more serious would happen. Right now, he should be at the labs. If the Team had put this thing up overnight, they would tease him unmercifully for sleeping through the great event.

The radio voice continued to reel off special notices, warnings, new bulletins. The announcer sounded as if he were on the thin edge of hysteria; evidently he had not yet been told what it was all about. Meister was tying his left shoe when he realized that the reports were beginning to sound much worse.

"From LaGuardia Field we have just been notified that an experimental plane had been flown through the barrier at a point over the jammed Triboro Bridge. It has not appeared over the city and is presumed lost. On the *Miss New York* disaster early this morning we still have no complete report. Authorities on Staten Island say the ferry ordinarily carried less than two hundred passengers at that hour, but thus far only eleven have been picked up. One of these survivors was brought in to a Manhattan slip by the tug *Marjorie Q;* he is still in a state of extreme shock and Bellevue Hospital says no statement can be expected from him until tomorrow. It appears, however, that he swam *under* the barrier."

His voice carried the tension he evidently felt. "Outside the screen a heavy fog still prevails—the same fog which hid the barrier from the ferry captain until his ship was destroyed almost to the midpoint. The Police Department has again requested that all New Yorkers stay—"

ALARMED at last, Meister switched off the machine and left the apartment, locking it carefully. Unless those idiots turned off their screen, there would be panic and looting before the day was out.

Downstairs, in the little grocery, there was a mob arguing in low, terrified voices, their faces as gray as the ominous sky. He pushed through them to the phone.

The grocer was sitting in back of it. "Phone service is tied up, Mr. Meister," he said hoarsely.

"I can get through, I think. What has happened?"

"Some foreign enemy, is *my* guess. There's a big dome of somethin' all around the city. Nobody can get in or out. You stick your hand in, you draw back a bloody stump. Stuff put through on the other side don't come through." He picked up the phone with a trembling hand and passed it over. "Good luck!"

Meister dialed Ellen first; he needed to know if she were badly frightened, and to reassure her if she were. Nothing happened for a while; then an operator said, "I'm sorry, sir, but there will be no private calls for the duration of the emergency, unless you have a priority."

"Give me emergency code B-Nineteen, then," Meister said.

"Your group, sir?"

"Screen Team."

There was a faint sound at the other end of the line, as if the girl had taken a quick breath. "Yes, sir," she said. "Right away." There was an angry crackle, and then the droning when the number was being rung.

"Screen Team," a voice said.

"Resonance section, please," Meister said, and when he was connected and had identified himself, a voice growled:

"Hello, Jake, this is Frank Schafer. Where the deuce are you? I sent you a telegram—but I suppose you didn't get it, the boards are jammed. Get on down here, quick!"

"No, I haven't any telegram," Meister said. "Whom do I congratulate?"

"Nobody, you fool! *We* didn't do this. We don't even know how it's been done!"

Meister felt the hairs on the back of his neck stirring; it was as if he were back in the tunnels of Concentration Camp Dora again. He swallowed and said, "But it is the anti-bomb screen?"

"The very thing," Schafer's tinny voice said bitterly. "Only somebody else has beat us to it—and we're trapped under it."

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"It's really bombproof—you're sure of that?"

"It's anything-proof! Nothing can pass it! *And we can't get out of it, either!*"

IT TOOK quite a while to get the story straight. Project B-19, the meaningless label borne by the top-secret, billion-dollar Atomic Defense Project, was in turmoil. Much of its laboratory staff had been in the field or in Washington when the thing had happened, and the jam in phone service had made it difficult to get the men who were still in the city back to the central offices.

"It's like this," Frank Schafer said, kneading a chunk of art gum rapidly. "This dome went up last night. It lets in a little light, and a few of the strongest outside radio stations near by. But that's all—or anyhow, all that we've been able to establish so far. It's a perfect dome, over the whole island and parts of the other boroughs and New Jersey. It doesn't penetrate the ground or the water, but the only really big water frontage is way out in the harbor—so that lets out much chance of everybody swimming under it like that man from the *Miss New York.*"

"The subways are running, I heard," Meister said.

"Sure; we can evacuate the city if we have to, but not fast enough." The mobile fingers crumbed bits off the sides of the art gum. "It won't take long to breathe up the air here, and if any fires start it'll be worse. Also there's a layer of ozone about twenty feet deep all along the inside of the barrier—but don't ask me why! Even if we don't have any big blazes, we're losing oxygen at a terrific rate by ozone-fixing and surface oxidization of the ionized area."

"Ionized?" Meister frowned. "Is there much?"

"Plenty!" Schafer said. "We haven't let it out, but in another twenty hours you won't be able to hear anything on the radio but a noise like a tractor climbing a pile of cornflakes. There's been an increase already. Whatever we're using for ether these days is building up tension fast."

A runner came in from the private wires and dropped a flimsy on Frank's desk. The physicist looked at it quickly, then passed it to Meister.

"That's what I figured. You can see the spot we're in."

The message reported that oxygen was diffusing inward through the barrier at about the same rate as might be accounted for by osmosis. The figures on loss of $CO_2$ were less easy to establish, but it appeared that the rate here was also of an osmotic order of magnitude. It was signed by a topnotch university chemist.

"Impossible!" Meister said.

"No, it's so. And New York is entirely too big a cell to live, Jake. If we're getting oxygen only osmotically, we'll be suffocated in a week. And did you ever hear of a semipermeable membrane passing a lump of coal, or a tomato? Air, heat, food—all cut off."

"What does the Army say?"

"What they usually say: 'Do something, on the double!' We're lucky we're civilians, or we'd be court-martialed for dying!" Schafer laughed angrily and pitched the art gum away. "It's a very pretty problem, in a way," he said. "We have our anti-bomb screen. Now we have to find how to make ourselves *vulnerable* to the bomb—or cash in our chips. And in six days—"

The phone jangled and Schafer snatched at it. "Yeah, this is Dr. Schafer. . . . I'm sorry, Colonel, but we have every available man called in now except those on the Mayor's commission . . . No, I don't know. Nobody knows, yet. We're tracing that radio signal now. If it has anything to do with the barrier, we'll be able to locate the generator and destroy it."

The physicist slammed the phone into its cradle and glared at Meister. "I've been taking this phone stuff all morning! I wish you'd showed up earlier. Here's the picture, briefly: The city is dying. Telephone and telegraph lines give us some communication with the outside, and we will be able to use radio inside the dome for a little while longer. There are teams outside trying to crack the barrier, but all the significant phenomena are taking place inside. Out there it just looks like a big black dome—no radiation effects, no ionization, no radio tone, no nothin'!

"We are evacuating now," he went on, "but if the dome stays up, over three-quarters of the trapped people will die. If there's any fire or violence, almost all of us will die."

"You talk," Meister said, "as if you want me to kill the screen all by myself."

Schafer grinned nastily. "Sure, Jake! This barrier obviously doesn't act specifically on nuclear reactions; it stops almost every-

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thing. Almost everyone here is a nuclear man, as useless for this problem as a set of cooky-cutters. Every fact we've gotten so far shows this thing to be an immense and infinitely complicated form of cavity-resonance—and you're the only resonance engineer inside it."

The grin disappeared, and Schafer said, "We can give you all the electronics technicians you need, plenty of official backing, and general theoretical help. It's not much but it's all we've got. We estimate about eleven million people inside this box—eleven million corpses unless you can get the lid off it."

Meister nodded. Somehow, the problem did not weigh as heavily upon him as it might have. He was remembering Dora, the wasted bodies jammed under the stairs, in storerooms, fed into the bake-oven five at a time. One could survive almost anything if one had had practice in surviving. There was only Ellen—

Ellen was probably in "The Box,"—the current dome. That meant something, where eleven million was only a number.

*"Entdecken,"* he murmured.

Schafer looked up at him, his blue eyes snapping sparks. Schafer certainly didn't look like one of the world's best nuclear physicists: Schafer was a sandy-haired runt—with the bomb hung over his head by a horsehair.

"What's that?" he said.

"A German word," Meister answered. "It means, to discover—literally, to take the roof off. That is the first step, it seems. To take the roof off, we must discover that transmitter."

"I've got men out with loop antennas. The geometrical center of the dome is right at the tip of the Empire State Building, but WNBT says there's nothing up there but their television transmitters."

"What they mean," Meister said, "is that there was nothing else up there two weeks ago. There *must* be a radiator at a radiant-point, no matter how well it is disguised."

"I'll send a team." Schafer got up, fumbling for the art gum he had thrown away. "I'll go myself, I guess. I'm jittery here."

"With your teeth? I would not advise it. You would die slain, as the Italians say!"

"Teeth?" Schafer said. He giggled nervously. "What's that got to—"

"You have metal in your mouth. If the mast is actually radiating this effect, your jawbones might be burnt out of your head. Get a group with perfect teeth, or porcelain fillings at best. And wear nothing with metal in it, not even shoes."

"Oh," Schafer said. "I knew we needed you, Jake." He rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead and reached into his shirt pocket for a cigarette.

Meister struck it out of his hand. "Six days' oxygen remaining," he said.

Schafer lunged up out of his chair, aimed a punch at Meister's head, and fainted across the desk.

THE DIM city stank of ozone. The street lights were still on, and despite the radioed warnings to stay indoors surging mobs struggled senselessly toward the barrier. Counterwaves surged back, coughing, from the unbreathable stuff pouring out from it. More piled up in subway stations; people screamed and trampled each other. Curiously, the city's "take" that day was enormous—not even disaster could break the deeply-entrenched habit of putting a dime in the turnstile.

The New York Central and Long Island Railroads, whose tracks were above ground where the screen cut across them, were shut down, as were the underground lines which came to the surface inside The Box. Special trains were running every three minutes from Pennsylvania Station, with passengers jamming the aisles and platforms.

In the Hudson Tubes the situation was worse. So great was the crush of fleeing humans there, they could hardly operate at all. The screen drew a lethal line between Hoboken and Newark, so that the Tube trains had to make the longer of the two trips to get their passengers out of The Box. A brief power interruption stopped one train in complete darkness for ten minutes beneath the Hudson River, and terror and madness swept through it.

Queens and Brooklyn subways siphoned off a little pressure from the others, but only a little. In a major disaster the normal human impulse is to go north, on the map-fostered myth that north is "up." Navy launches were readied to ferry as many as cared to make the try out to where The Box lay over the harbor and the rivers but thus far there were no such swimmers. Very few people can swim twenty feet under water, and coming up for air short of that twenty feet would be disastrous.

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That would be as fatal as coming up in the barrier itself; ozone is lung-rot in high concentrations. That alone kept most of the foolhardy from trying to run through the wall—that and the gas-masked police cordon. From Governor's Island, about half of which was in The Box, the little Army ferries shipped over several cases of small-arms, which were distributed to subway and railroad guards. Two detachments of infantry also came along, relieving a little of the strain on the police.

Meister, hovering with two technicians and the helicopter pilot over a building on the edge of the screen, peered downward in puzzlement. It was hard to make any sense of the geometry of shadows below him.

"Give me the phone," he said.

The senior technician passed him the mike. A comparatively long-wave channel had been cleared by a major station for the emergency teams and the prowl-cars, since nothing could be heard in the short waves above that eternal humming.

"Frank, are you on?" Meister called. "Any word from Ellen yet?"

"No, but her landlady says she went to Jersey to visit yesterday," came over the air waves. There was an unspoken understanding between them that the hysterical attack of an hour ago would not be mentioned. "You'll have to crack The Box to get more news, I guess, Jake. See anything yet?"

"Nothing but more trouble. Have you thought yet about heat conservation? I am reminded that it is summer; we will soon have an oven here."

"I thought of that, but it isn't so," Frank Schafer's voice said. "It seems hotter only because there's no wind. Actually, the Weather Bureau says we're *losing* heat pretty rapidly; they expect the drop to level at fifteen to twenty above."

Meister whistled. "So low! Yet there is a steady supply of calories in the water—"

"Water's a poor conductor. What worries me is this accursed ozone. It's diffusing through the city—already smells like the inside of a transformer around here!"

"What about the Empire State Building?"

"Not a thing. We ran soap bubbles along the power leads, to see if something was tapping some of WNBT's power, but there isn't a break in them anywhere. Maybe you'd better go over there when you're through at the barrier. There's some things we can't make sense of."

"I shall," Meister said. "I will leave here as soon as I start a fire."

Schafer began to sputter. Meister smiled gently and handed the phone back to the technician.

"Break out the masks," he said. "We can go down now."

A ROOFTOP beside the barrier was like some hell dreamed up in the violent ward of a hospital. Every movement accumulated a small static charge on the surface of the body, which discharged stingingly and repeatedly from the finger tips and even the tip of the nose if it approached a grounded object too closely.

Only a few yards away was the unguessable wall itself, smooth, deep-gray, featureless, and yet somehow quivering with a pseudo-life of its own—a shimmering haze just too dense to penetrate. It had no definite boundary; instead, the tarpaper over which it lay here began to dim, and within a foot had faded into the general mystery.

Meister looked at the barrier. The absence of anything upon which the eye could fasten was dizzying. The mind made up patterns and flashes of livid color and projected them into the grayness, and sometimes it seemed that the fog extended for miles. A masked policeman stepped over from the inside parapet and touched him on the elbow.

"Wouldn't look at her too long, sir," he said. "We've had ambulances below, carting away sightseers who forgot to look away. Pretty soon your eyes sort of get fixed."

Meister nodded. The thing was hypnotic, all right. And yet the eye was drawn to it because it was the only source of light here. The ionization was so intense that it bled off power from the lines, so that the street lamps were off all around the edge. From the helicopter, the city had looked as if its rim had been inked out in a vast ring. Meister could feel the individual hairs all over his body stirring; it made him feel infested. Well, there'd been no shortage of lice at Dora!

Behind him the technicians were unloading the apparatus from the 'copter. Meister beckoned. "Get a reading on field strength first of all," he said gloomily. "Whoever is doing this has plenty of power. Ionized gas, a difficult achievement—"

He stopped suddenly. Not so difficult. The city was enclosed; it was, in effect, a giant Geissler tube. Of course the concen-

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tration of rare gases was not high enough to produce a visible glow, but—

"Plenty high," the technician with the loop said. "Between forty-five thousand and fifty thousand. Seems to be rising a little, too."

"Between—" Meister stepped quickly over to the instrument. Sure enough, the black needle was wavering, so rapidly as to be only a fan-shaped blur between the two figures. "This is ridiculous! Is that instrument reliable?"

"I just took the underwriters' seal off it," the techician said. "Did you figure this much ozone could be fixed out without any alternation?"

"Yes, I had presupposed the equivalent of UV bombardment. This changes things. No wonder there is light leaking through that screen! Sergeant—"

"Yessir?" the policeman mumbled through his mask.

"How much of the area below can you clear?"

"As much as you need."

"Good." Meister reached into his jacket pocket and produced the map of the city the pilot had given him. "We are here, yes? Make a cordon, then, from here to here." His soft pencil point scrawled a black line around four buildings. "Then get as much fire-fighting equipment outside the line as you can muster."

"You're expecting a bad fire?"

"No, a *good* one. But hurry!"

The cop scratched his head puzzledly, but he went below. Meister smiled. Members of the Screen Team were the "Mister Bigs" in this city now—and twenty hours ago nobody'd ever heard of the Screen Team.

The technician, working with nervous quickness, was tying an oscilloscope into the loop circuit. Meister nodded approvingly. If there was a pulse to this phenomenon, it would be just as well to know what its form was. He snapped his fingers.

"What's wrong, doctor?"

"My memory. I have put my head on backwards when I got up this morning, I think. We will have to photograph the waveform; it will be too complex to analyze here."

"How do you know?" the technician asked.

"By that radio tone," Meister said. "You Americans work by sight—there are almost no resonance electronics men in this country. But in Germany we worked as much by ear as by eye. Where you convert a wave into a visible pattern, we turned it into an audible one. We had a saying that resonance engineers were disappointed musicians."

The face of the tube suddenly produced a green wiggle. It was the kind of wiggle a crazy man might make. The technician looked at it in dismay. "That," he said, "doesn't exist. I won't work in a science where it *could* exist!"

Meister grinned. "That is what I meant. The radio sound was a fundamental B-flat, but with hundreds of harmonics and overtones. You don't have it all in the field yet."

"I don't?" And he looked. "So I don't! But when I reduce it that much, you can't see the shape of the modulations."

"We will have to photograph it by sections."

BRINGING over the camera, the other man set it up. They worked rapidly, oppressed by the unnatural pearly glimmer, the masks, the stink of ozone which crept in at the sides of the treated cloth, the electrical prickling—above all by the silent terror of any trapped animal.

While they worked, the cop came back and stood silently by, watching. The gas mask gave no indication of his expression, but Meister could feel the pressure of faith radiating from the man. Doubtless these bits of equipment were meaningless to him—but bits of equipment like these had put up The Box, beyond the powers of policemen or presidents to take it down again. Men who knew about such things were as good as gods, now.

Unless they failed.

"That does it," the technician said.

The cop stepped forward. "I've got the area you marked roped off," he said diffidently. "We've searched these apartments and there's nobody in them. If there's any fire here, we'll be able to control it."

"Excellent!" Meister said. "Remember that this gas will feed the flames, however. You will need every possible man."

"Yessir. Anything else?"

"Just get out of the district yourself."

Meister climbed into the plane and stood by the open hatch, looking at his wrist watch. He gave the cop ten minutes to leave the tenement and get out to the fire lines. Then he struck a match and pitched it out onto the roof.

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"Up!" he shouted.

The rotors roared. The pitch on the roof began to smolder. A tongue of flame shot up. Three seconds later the whole side of the roof nearest the gray screen was blazing.

The helicopter lurched and clawed for altitude.

Behind the plane was a brilliant and terrifying yellow glare. Meister didn't bother to watch it. He squatted with his back to the fire and waved pieces of paper over the neck of a bottle.

The ammonia fumes were invisible and couldn't be smelled through the masks, but on the dry-plates wiggly lines were appearing. Meister studied them, nibbling gently at his lower lip. With luck, the lines would answer one question, at least: they would tell what The Box was. With luck, they might even tell how it was produced.

They would *not* tell where it came from.

The motion of the 'copter changed suddenly, and Meister's stomach stirred uneasily under his belt. He stowed the plates and looked up. The foreshortened spire of the Empire State Building pointed up at him through the transparent deck; another 'copter hovered at its tip. The television antennas were hidden now in what seemed to be a globe of some dark substance.

Meister picked up the radio-phone. "Schafer?" he called—this to the Empire State Building.

"No, this is Talliafero," came back in answer. "Schafer's back at the labs. We're about ready to leave. Need any help?"

"I don't think so," Meister said. "Is that foil you have around the tower mast?"

"Yes, but it's only a precaution. The whole tower's radiating. The foil radiates, too, now that we've got it up. See you later."

The other 'copter stirred and swooped away.

Meister twisted the dial up into the short-wave region. The humming surged in; he valved down the volume and listened intently. The sound was different, somehow. After a moment his mind placed it. The fundamental B-flat was still there, but some of the overtones were gone; that meant that hundreds of them, which the little amplifier could not reproduce, were also gone. The set upon which he was listening was FM; his little table set at the apartment was AM—so the wave was modulated along both axes, and probably pulse-modulated as well. But why should it simplify as one approached its source?

Resonance, of course. The upper harmonics were echoes. Yet a simple primary tone in a well-known frequency range couldn't produce The Box by itself; it was the harmonics that made the difference—and the harmonics couldn't appear without the existence of some chamber like The Box. Along this line of reasoning, The Box was a pre-condition of its own existence. Meister felt his head swimming.

"Hey," the pilot said. "It's starting to snow!"

Meister turned off the set and looked out. "All right, let's go home now."

DESPITE its depleted staff, the Screen Team was quiet with the intense hush of concentration which was its equivalent of roaring activity. Frank Schafer's door was closed, but Meister didn't bother to knock. He was on the edges of an idea, and there was no time to be consumed in formalities.

There were a number of uniformed men in the office with Frank. There was also a big man in expensive clothes, and a smaller man who looked as if he needed sleep. The smaller man had dark circles under his eyes, but despite his haggardness Meister knew him: the mayor. The big man did not look familiar—nor pleasant.

As for the high brass, nothing in a uniform looked pleasant to Meister. He pushed forward and put the dry-plates down on Schafer's desk. "The resonance products," he said. "If we can duplicate the fundamental in the lab—"

There was a roar from the big man. "Dr. Schafer, is this the man we've been waiting for?"

Schafer made a tired gesture. "Jake, this is Roland Dean," he said. "You know the mayor, I think. These others are Security officers. They seem to think you made The Box."

Meister stiffened. "I? That's idiotic!"

"Any noncitizen is automatically under suspicion," one of the Army men said. "However, Dr. Schafer exaggerates. We just want to ask a few questions."

The mayor coughed. He was obviously tired, and the taint of ozone did not make breathing very comfortable.

"I'm afraid there's more to it than that, Dr. Meister," he added. "Mr. Dean here has insisted upon an arrest. I'd like to say for myself that I think it all quite stupid."

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"Thank you," Meister said. "What is Mr. Dean's interest in this?"

"Mr. Dean," Schafer growled, "is the owner of that block of tenements you're burning out up north. The fire's spreading, by the way. When I told him I didn't know why you lit it, he blew his top."

"Why not?" Dean said, glaring at Meister. "I fail to see why this emergency should be made an excuse for irresponsible destruction of property. Have you any reason for burning my buildings, Meister?"

"Are you having any trouble breathing, Mr. Dean?" Meister asked easily.

"Certainly! Who isn't? Do you think you can make it easier for us by filling The Box with smoke?"

Meister nodded. "I gather that you have no knowledge of elementary chemistry, Mr. Dean. The Box is rapidly converting our oxygen into an unbreathable form. A good hot fire will consume some of it, but it will also break up the ozone molecules. The ratio is about two atoms of oxygen consumed for every one set free—out of three which in the form of ozone could not have been breathed at all."

Schafer sighed gustily. "I should have guessed. A neat scheme, Jake—but what about the ratio between reduction of ozone and overall oxygen consumption?"

"Large enough to maintain five of the six days' grace with which we started. Had we let the ozone-fixing process continue unabated, we should not have lasted forty hours longer."

"Mumbo jumbo!" Dean said stonily, turning to Schafer. "A halfway measure. The problem is to get us out of this mess, not to stretch our sufferings out by three days by invading property rights. This man is a German, probably a Nazi! By your own admission, he's been the only man in your whole section who's seemed to know what to do. And nothing he's done so far has shown any result, except to destroy some of my buildings!"

"Dr. Meister, just what *has* been accomplished thus far?" a colonel of Intelligence said.

"Only a few tentative observations," Meister said. "We have most of the secondary phenomena charted."

"Charts!" Dean snorted.

"Can you offer any assurance that The Box will be down in time?" the colonel asked.

"That," Meister said, "would be very foolish of me. The possibility exists; that is all. Certainly it will take time—we have barely scratched the surface."

"In that case, I'm afraid you'll have to consider yourself under arrest—"

"See here, colonel!" Schafer surged to his feet, his face flushed. "Don't you know that he's the only man in The Box who can crack it? That fire was good common sense. If you arrest my men for *not* doing anything, we'll never get anything done!"

"I am not exactly stupid, Dr. Schafer," the colonel said harshly. "I have no interest in Mr. Dean's tenements, and if the mayor is forced to jail Dr. Meister we will spring him at once. All I'm interested in is the chance that Dr. Meister may be *maintaining* The Box instead of trying to *crack* it."

"Explain, please," Meister said mildly.

PULLING himself up to military straightness, the colonel cleared his throat and said:

"You're inside The Box. If you put it up, you have a way out of it, and know where the generator is. You may go where you please, but from now on we'll have a guard with you . . . Satisfied, Dr. Schafer?"

"It doesn't satisfy me!" Dean rumbled. "What about my property? Are you going to let this madman burn buildings with a guard to help?"

The colonel looked at the landlord. "Mr. Dean," he said quietly, "you seem to think The Box was created to annoy you personally. The Army hasn't the technical knowledge to destroy it, but it has sense enough to realize that more than just New York is under attack here. The enemy, whoever he may be, thinks his screen uncrackable otherwise he wouldn't have given us this chance to work on it by boxing in one city alone. If The Box is not down in, say, eight days, he'll know that New York failed and died—and every city in the country will be bombed to slag the next morning."

Schafer sat down again, looking surly. "Why?" he asked the army man. "Why would they waste the bombs when they could just box in the cities?"

"Inefficient. America's too big to occupy except slowly, piecemeal. They'd have no reason to care if large parts of it were uninhabitable for a while. The important thing is to knock us out as a military force, as a power in world affairs."

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"If they boxed in all the cities at once—"

The colonel shook his head. "We have rocket emplacements of our own, and they *aren't* in large cities. Neither Box nor bomb would catch more than a few of them. No—they have to know that The Box is uncrackable—so they can screen their own cities against our bombs until our whole country is knocked out. With The Box, that would take more than a week, and their cities would suffer along with ours. With bombs, a day would be enough—so they've allowed us this test. If New York comes out of this, there'll be no attack, at least until they've gotten a better screen. The Box seems good enough so far!"

"Politics," Schafer said, shaking his head disgustedly, "is much too devious for me! Doesn't The Box constitute an attack?"

"Certainly—but who's doing the attacking?" the colonel demanded. "We can guess, but we don't know. And I doubt very much that the enemy has left any traces."

Meister stiffened suddenly, a thrill of astonishment shooting up his backbone. Schafer stared at him.

"Traces!" Meister said. "Of course! That is what has been stopping us all along. Naturally there would be no traces; we have been wasting time looking for them. Frank, the generator is not in the Empire State Building. *It is not even in The Box!*"

"But Jake, it's got to be," Schafer said. "It's physically impossible for it to be outside!"

"A trick," Dean rumbled.

Meister waved his hands excitedly. "No, no! This is the reasoning which has made our work so fruitless. Observe: As the colonel says, the enemy would not dare leave traces. Now, workmanship is traceable, particularly if the device is revolutionary, as this one is. Find that generator, and you know at once which country has made it. You observe the principle, and you say to yourself, 'Ah, yes, there were reports, rumors, whispers of shadows of rumors of such a principle, but I discounted them as fantasy; they came out of CountryX.' Do you follow?"

"Yes, but—"

"But no country would leave such a fingerprint where it could be found. This we can count upon—whereas, we know as yet next to nothing about the physics of The Box. Therefore, if it is physically impossible for the generator to be outside The Box, this does not mean that we must continue to search for it inside. It means that we must find a physical principle which makes it possible to be outside!"

Frank Schafer threw up his hands. "Revise basic physics in a week! Well, let's try it. I suppose Meister's allowed lab work, Colonel?"

"Certainly, as long as my guards aren't barred from the laboratory."

THIRTY hours later the snow had stopped falling, leaving a layer a little over three inches deep. The battling mobs were no longer on the streets. Hopeless masses were jammed body to body in railroad stations and subways. The advancing ozone had driven the trapped people in upon themselves, and into the houses and basements where rooms could be sealed against the searing stench.

Thousands had already died along the periphery; the New Jersey and Brooklyn shores were charnel heaps, where men had fought to get back across the river to Manhattan and cleaner air. The tenements along the West Side of the island still blazed, twenty linear blocks of them, but the fire had failed to jump Ninth Avenue and was dying for want of fuel. Elsewhere, it was very cold; the city was dying.

Over it, The Box was invisible. It was the third night.

And in the big lab at the Team Office, Meister, Schafer and the two technicians suddenly disappeared under a little Box of their own, leaving behind four frantic soldiers. Meister sighed gustily and looked at the black screen a few feet away from his head.

"Now we know," he said. "Frank, you can turn on the light now."

The desk lamp clicked on. In the shaded glow, Meister saw that tears were trickling down Schafer's cheeks.

"No, no, don't weep yet, the job is not quite done!" Meister cried. "But see—so simple, so beautiful!" He gestured at the lump of metal in the exact center of the Boxed area. "Here we are—four men, a bit of metallic trash, an empty desk, a lamp, a cup of foil. Where is the screen generator? Outside!"

Schafer swallowed. "But it isn't," he said hoarsely. "Oh, you were right, Jake—the key projector *is* outside. But it doesn't generate the screen; it just excites the iron, there, and that does the job." He looked at

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the scattered graphs on the desk top. "I'd never have dreamed such a jam of fields was possible! Look at those waves—catching each other, heterodyning, slowing each other up as the tension increases. No wonder the whole structure of space gives way when they finally get in phase!"

One of the technicians looked nervously at the little Box and cleared his throat. "I still don't see why it should leak light, oxygen, and so forth, even the little that it does. The jam has to be radiated away, and the screen should be the subspatial equivalent of a perfect radiator, a black body. But it's gray."

"No, it's black," Schafer said. "But it isn't on all the time. If it were, the catalyst radiation couldn't get through. It's a perfect electromagnetic push-me-pull-you. The apparatus outside projects the catalyst fields in. The lump of iron—in this case, the Empire State Building—is excited and throws off the screen fields; the screen goes up; the screen cuts off the catalyst radiation; the screen goes down; in comes the primary beam again—and so on. The kicker is that without the off-again-on-again, you wouldn't get anything—the screen couldn't exist because the intermittence supplies some of the necessary harmonics."

He grinned ruefully. "Here I am explaining it as if I understood it. You're a good teacher, Jake!"

"Once one realizes that the screen has to *be* up before it can *go* up," Meister said, grinning back, "one has the rest—or most of it. Introducing a rhythmic interruption of the very first pulses is a simple trick. The hardest thing about it is timing—to know just when the screen goes up for the first time, so that the blinker can be cut out at precisely that moment."

"So how do we get out?"

"Feedback," Meister said. "There must be an enormous back EMF in the incoming beam. And whether it is converted and put back into the system again at the source, or just efficiently wasted, we can burn it out." He consulted a chalk line which ran along the floor from the edge of the little Box to the lump of iron, and then picked up the cup of foil and pointed it along the mark away from the lump. "The trick," he said soberly, "is not to nullify, but to amplify—"

The glare of the overheads burst in upon them. The lab was jammed with soldiers, all with rifles at the ready and all the rifles pointing in at them. The smell of burned insulation curled from an apparatus at the other end of the chalkline.

"Oh," said Schafer. "We forgot the most important thing! Which way does our chalk line run from the Empire State, I wonder?"

"It could be anywhere above the horizon," Meister said. "Try pointing your reflector straight up, first."

Schafer swore. "Any time you want a diploma for unscrewing the inscrutable, Jake," he said, "I'll write you one with my nose!"

IT WAS cold and quiet now in the city. The fires on the West Side, where one of the country's worst slums had been burnt out, smoldered and flickered.

The air was a slow, cumulative poison. It was very dark.

On top of the Empire State Building, a great, shining bowl swung in a certain direction, stopped, waited. Fifty miles above it, in a region where neither "cold" nor "air" have any human meaning, a clumsy torpedo began to warm slightly. Inside it, delicate things glowed, fused—melted. There was no other difference; the torpedo kept on, traveled at its assigned twenty-one and eight-tenth miles per minute. It would always do so.

The Box vanished. The morning sunlight glared in. There was a torrent of rain as cold air hit hot July. Within minutes the city was as gray as ever, but with roiling thunderheads. People poured out of the buildings into the downpour, hysterical faces turned to the free air, shouting amid the thunder, embracing each other, dancing in the lightning flares.

The storm passed almost at once, but the dancing went on quite a while.

"Traces!" Meister said to Frank Schafer. "Where else could you hide them? An orbital missile was the only answer."

"That sunlight," Schafer said, "sure looks good! You'd better go home to bed, Jake, before the official hero-worshippers catch up with you."

But Meister was already dreamlessly asleep.

**Featured Next Issue: SEA KINGS OF MARS, Novel by Leigh Brackett**

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# THE READER SPEAKS

*(Continued from page 10)*

an extraordinary story, a full-length, full-bodied job that deserves rating with the finest science-fiction stories THRILLING WONDER STORIES has ever published.

Primarily it tells the story of Matt Carse, Earthborn archeologist of the Red Planet, and if his strange adventures when a treacherous and highly illegal Martian tomb-robber, Penkawr of Barrakesh, leads him to the eons-lost tomb of Rhiannon and its famous sword, there to trap him when Carse refuses to deal for the invaluable loot upon a thief's terms.

Carse escapes, but only after a weird and, at the time, inexplicable experience with the very-much-alive devices guarding the supposedly dead tomb. And when he finally does regain freedom, he emerges into a world far different from the dust-raddled and decayed ruin of a planet he had left.

There, in the Mars of a million years ago, a green and live and deadly world, he discovers the dream-world of an archeologist, but a dream that is very much reality. He must fight for survival, for romance and for an understanding of the strange and wonderful era into which he has been tumbled.

SEA KINGS OF MARS is Miss Brackett's most distinguished science fiction effort to date. It is a story of color and warmth and imaginative sweep and pseudo-scientific ingenuity virtually guaranteed to leave the reader breathless.

Heading the supporting cast for Miss Brackett and her Sea-Kings is an unusual and fascinating novelet by Arthur J. Burks, whose YESTERDAY'S DOORS, published in our issue of last October, is still receiving considerable reader attention. This time, in WHITE CATASTROPHE, he considers the problem of what could happen should a man-induced blizzard occur in the hot Amazon regions of Brazil.

Jose Pindobal, obscure plantation physicist in the Belterra area, is the human storm maker and his spur to ambition was his wife, Maria, who found his small salary highly unsatisfactory and drove him to seek fame and fortune by whatever means he could discover.

Jose's discovery involves the scientific creation of a localized ice age via a calculated misuse of the laboratory instruments at his disposal. But there was a hitch. The one-man ice age refused to stay localized after the fashion of a snowball rolling downhill and Jose was soon up to his neck in snow and ice.

The result is a riot in every sense of the word—and a perfectly swell yarn. Unlike most stories of henpecked scientists this tale is enlightened by excellent characterizations and brilliant background writing—for Mr. Burks, after a number of years engaged in scientific search in the Amazon Valley, knows Brazil backward, forward and inside out.

As for the shorter stories—well, the next issue's splendid lineup will be selected from a group of tales concocted by the best available fiction and fantasy writers, including Ray Bradbury, Margaret St. Clair, John D. MacDonald, Noel Loomis, A. E. van Vogt, Murray Leinster, Arthur C. Clarke, William F. Temple, Fredric Brown, James Blish, Henry Kuttner, Theodore Sturgeon and others. And, of course, we'll be hanging around with our regular departments, THE READER SPEAKS, THE FRYING PAN and THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW, to supplement numerous shorter science features. The next issue holds forth plenty of promise!

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## LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

THE editorial on the subject of dictatorships which we ran in our December issue seems to have drawn considerable and favorable comment. But in the same issue there appeared a story by L. Ron Hubbard, entitled 240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP, dealing indirectly with a U. S.-Russian duel for control of the Moon which seems to have caused certain adherents of what is gently termed "planned society" to empty the vials of wrath upon Mr. Hubbard and ourselves.

We follow with excerpts from two of the several letters received along this line and a third one complete, after which we shall make our rebuttal. Here goes—

### SPREADERS OF HATE
**by D. C. King**

Dear Editor: It would appear that some of the Russia-haters who have been keeping more or less to



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themselves up until now have suddenly decided that the time was ripe when decency, public sentiment, consequences and logic could be cast aside once more and they could get back into business at the old stand.

It is, of course, common knowledge that relations between this country and the USSR have been getting worse instead of better; one of the reasons is such irresponsible writing as one finds in the December TWS. This might seem putting the cart before the horse to you—I think not. Whatever one may feel about this, I'm sure no one expects anti-Russian slander to help anything or anyone except those who might stand to profit from another war, which is virtually no one. . .

I am not, of course, writing to attack Hubbard because he does not happen to like the USSR. Many of my friends do not either. That is their and his and your privilege and I would not have it otherwise. What I do object to is the use of filthy and unprovable allegations to drum up hate for a fictional enemy. Of course, in this case, the "enemy" is not fictional but real and that is just what is wrong. . . (Mr. King insists that Hubbard's citing of Soviet atrocities and slave labor camps is unprovable and therefore false).—*Cragmoor Village, Colorado Springs, Colo.*

Then comes this—

## FALSE IMPRESSIONS
### by L. Sussman

Dear Editor: It's O.K. for science-fiction writers to endlessly repeat their imaginary stories of space-travel, war, exploration, time-travel—of life in their artificial cities of the future (have I left out any well-worn plot??) etc, etc. It's not so good however, when false impressions are given of individuals and organizations.

This happened in the December TWS story 240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP by L. Ron Hubbard, a Moon-trip-Russian Menace combination plot. A leading character in this tale is "General Slavinsky, who is from modern Russia and who "had been a Trotskyite since boyhood."

That is more fantastic than the rest of the story. To represent the long and bitter fight of 1924-28 between the factions of Stalin and Leon Trotsky—Stalin in defense of his personal dictatorship and his policy of Russian nationalism, Trotsky counterposing Soviet democracy and internationalism—as a minor local quarrel between Russians is *deceptive, misleading* and *criminally false!!!* . . . (the italics and exclamation points are Mr. Sussman's, who then goes on to a detailed defense of Trotskyist internationalism).—*2127 North Park Avenue, Philadelphia, Penn.*

For the complete case we select the letter of another Philadelphian, to-wit—

## SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT
### by Janvier L. Hamell

Dear Editor: I have been an avid reader of STF for about 10 years, and during the earlier period when I was not preoccupied with the unpleasant realities of modern society, such as making enough mazuma to feed and clothe myself, even went to the extreme of joining a fan club and becoming an "actifan."

As such I have become relatively immune to the waves of propaganda which periodically permeate my favorite escape literature, such as the anti-German, anti-Japanese race and nationality baiting which was prevalent during World War II and the present concept that all Russians are power-hungry fiends seeking to dominate the world with their so-called "communism."

However, there comes a time when such slander, instead of being directed against races and nationalities, which is, I believe rejected by American workers of average intelligence, becomes attacks upon political theories about which many people do not know the facts, and therefore accept uncontested lies as truth.

All of this is in reference to L. Ron Hubbards novelette, 240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP in December's TWS.

A principal villain of this yarn is a "General Slavinsky," a sadistic megalomaniac Russian, who has risen to a position of importance in the Russian Army.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hubbard identifies Slavinsky with Trotskyism. I will no more than mention the obvious contradiction of a Russian General being a "Trotskyite since boyhood."

Trotskyists depend upon the acceptance and endorsement of their program of scientific socialism as a cure to the evils of modern society—and their basic cause: decaying imperialist capitalism—by the great masses of workers and working farmers, the majority of the population.

As such they continually publicize their program in counterposition to whatever incorrect program is in power, in order to gain the support of the workers and farmers. Because of this, the Russian Trotskyists were hounded into exile or underground many years ago by the Stalinist bureaucracy, whose power depends upon ruthless suppression of all opposition. Stalin's dictatorship has put tens and hundreds of thousands of Trotskyists and other anti-Stalinist workers accused of Trotskyism not only underground, but six feet underground.

Obviously there are no Trotskyist generals in the Russian Army.

The prime point of contradiction in the story, I believe, is Mr. Hubbard's concept of a Trotskyist using the strategic military position of sitting on the Moon in order to impose his will upon the world.

Such a totalitarian position could well be taken by a Stalin, a Hitler or the Wall St. imperialists, where the idea is to perpetuate the rule of a minority, to the benefit of a minority through superiority of an armed police or military force against the will and the interests of an unarmed and disunited majority, the exploited and oppressed millions of the working class and peasantry.

A Trotskyist, on the contrary, would use such a position, at most, to shower the nations of the world with Marxist literature, in order to acquaint the masses of the world with their true class position and the necessity of their rising up against their masters and ending war, depression and totalitarianism and all the other woes of both capitalism and Stalinism by instituting a democratically elected Workers and Farmers Government, to act in the interests of, and under the control of the great majority, the working class, the only useful class in modern society; to establish social ownership of the means of production, and put the capitalists to useful work thus removing them from their parasitical existence at the expense of the working population; and, lastly, to begin the socialist reconstruction of society on a rational basis of planned production to meet the needs and wants of the people, instead of the present anarchy of capitalist production, dependent only upon the flow of profits, with its consequent depressions, wars, and inflations.

The only force Trotskyists use is the force of a scientifically correct program and the only force Trotskyists can use to apply their program to a nation or to the world is the support of an enlightened, class-conscious proletariat, the vast majority of the population.

I realize that this letter has turned out to be quite long. However, it is unfortunately impossible to state the facts on this question in broad generalisms or abbreviated argument. In view of the grievous injustice you have done the Trotskyist Movement by printing this story with its completely inaccurate picture of the character of Trotskyists and Trotskyism, I hope you will find space to right a wrong by publishing this letter in "The Reader Speaks."—*1204 Marlyn Rd., Philadelphia Pa.*

To say we are surprised is to put it mildly. However, we think both Mr. Hubbard, as author, and ourselves, as publishers, of 240,000 MILES STRAIGT UP have a right to a word or two in our own defense. So let's take up the accusations in order.

In the first place, the truth about Russian atrocities, Mr. King, are not and never will be provable—until the rulers of the USSR are willing to open their frontiers to free travel by other peoples, instead of maintaining an isolation less reminiscent of Shangri La than

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of the Alamut citadel of the Assassins of the Middle Ages. Until they do open themselves up to the world neither they nor their supporters have the right to protest any theoretical conditions hazarded as existing behind their so-called "iron curtain."

The chances are that they have plenty to hide or they wouldn't be hiding it.

As for Messrs. Sussman and Harnell and their vehement protest against the character of General Slavinsky and his allegedly impossible Troskyism, it seems to us that they have missed the boat. In their ideological rush to the defense of their idol they have ignored Mr. Hubbard's skill in the creation of an entirely problematical thesis upon which his story is based.

Not only was the entire incident, including General Slavinsky, a dream—but it was the dream of a not-too-bright young U. S. Army officer selected for action rather than intellectual skills to lead the first expedition to the Moon, in a time of extreme international pressure between the two countries. Just the kind of a Joe who would have a dream like that—and as such was a well conceived and drawn literary character. If his Russian General stretches the credulity of the inexorably class-conscious, it is unlikely that he would stretch that of a young American officer like Gray.

Sometimes we wonder just how long a reincarnated Karl Marx would last in either a Trotskyist or Stalinist Russia.

## AGATHON MARATHON
### by Edwin J. Moran

Dear Editor: In the December TWS the shorts seemed to me much better than the four longer stories, except for FRUITS OF THE AGATHON, of which more anon. The Smith, Hubbard and Leinster tales were adequate and certainly enjoyable, but were hardly memorable.

Regarding the shorts—Bradbury was himself again in THE OFF SEASON—need I say more? The biting irony of the last paragraph was shocking. Ah well, the years may mellow our genius' (one of the few in science fiction) attitude toward his fellow men—or is he really a Martian?

Of the three "terrible tales about tiny tots" (apologies to someone), F. B. Long's FUZZY HEAD was my favorite. Johnny was fortunate in having not one, but two, understanding fathers. Benj. Miller has succeeded in writing humorous stf—no mean feat. The Orig Prem series is a far cry from the late and unlamented Tubby tripe. Fredric Brown's KNOCK was a fine workmanlike bit of writing.

FRUITS OF THE AGATHON impressed me very much, mainly because its psychological theme is a fascinating one. Harness created some very live characters, although Piggy seemed more of a caricature. But then, all of us know some people who act like caricatures.

There were several points in the story that left me somewhat puzzled. One—the definition of Agathon at the beginning led me to believe that it was in general practise, yet the story itself clearly indicated that only one case of it actually occurred that of Dr. John Follansbee.

Two—the explanation of the single biostat recording of twins' minds seems faulty to a poor ignorant layman. Why should twins have the same encephalographic pattern? Since twins are born an appreciable length of time apart, from minutes to a couple of days, a biostat could be tuned in to each.

Three—it seems to me that if Agathon is practised the biostat would actually predict not a man's normal death but his Agathon. I can't accept Rachs' justification of it. It's still murder to me. But then, of course, that's one of the main points of the story.

Four—Toring's coup of a specialized psychokinesis would not be lost for generations as stated. Naida, having been impressed by Toring's complete mind, would also have that secret, wouldn't she?

Five—a minor point (Praise Allah!—Ed.). On page 78 Piggy "flung his weapon at his brother, turned and laughed mightily at the lab door. It vanished in a shower of glass and plastic." A powerful laugh, that—but I substituted "lunged" for "laughed" and went on from there. Right?

Possibly stories such as AGATHON that baffle me and make me take time out for a little thinking impress me unduly—but I'm a sucker for them.

With rare exceptions your readers' column runs the gamut of interest from Astra to Zimmer. Since Astra is Zimmer my meaning is clear.—*144 East Pike Street, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania.*

You're in trouble, all right, Mr. Moran, but not half as much as you have put us in. Well, let's see what we can do to save the day—not much, we fear. On count one you seem to have a point—enough said. On count two I believe, regardless of interval of birth, that the same biostat recording might conceivably apply to identical twins. Count three—the ethics are yours, not those of Mr. Harness' characters. As to four—well, George Mendel's great biological discoveries lay under dust for two generations and his "law" has only recently been annulled by Soviet Government for having bourgeois tendencies. In five you are either correct or Piggy had a supersonic laugh.

## ANOTHER PLEA FROM ENGLAND
### by Francis R. North

Dear Editor: Allow me as an English reader of your unique magazines, THRILLING WONDER STORIES and STARTLING STORIES to congratulate you on the high standard and originality of the stories you publish. I started reading science fiction at the age of twelve and am still very much interested.

Over here it is impossible to buy casual copies of your books. So if any other English reader of this column sees this letter and has back copies of TWS or SS I shall be very glad to hear from him, her or them. —*29 Two Gates Lane, Bradley, Staffordshire, England.*

Are you there, Captain Slater—are you there?

## PLENTY OF ROOM
### by Joan Stafford

Dear Editor: Is there room for a newcomer to science fiction? This month's issue (December, 1948) was so wonderful I just can't express how much I enjoyed the many stories therein. I can't list them in the order in which I liked them because each is so good that I can pick none above the others. Keep them coming, Ed.—*519 Brighton Avenue, Spring Lake, New Jersey.*

May the fine flush of your first enthusiasm

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never fade, Joan. But write us again soon—and at greater length.

## ERA'S END
### by Rodney Palmer

Dear Editor: THRILLING WONDER STORIES, December 1948. This issue brings to an end an era that will long be remembered in the annals of stf. Ray Bradbury spiraled to his peak with the unforgettable *"And The Moon Be Still As Bright"* and Arthur J. Burks' mission on Earth was accomplished with the printing of *"Yesterday's Doors."*

With the possible exception of our beloved back room every issue abounded with greatness and highest interest. Outside of editorial comment and due aptly, sometimes caustically administered this potentially powerful cargo of opinion has degenerated into a rather dismal, useless battlefield wherein old tired causes are fought over and over again and tattered banners still discolor a more promising horizon.

One's shadowed orbs lighten even when some emotional idealist writes in to say the mag's lousy, brother and that's that. Them's fightin' words and for awhile this timely injection from a frustrated fictioneer sets us all on our pins, raving for blood. . . . It's a losing battle, uphill all the way.

Take this suggestion or throw it away: Cull the letters for quality and when the milk and water begins to flow get in target practice as between crumpled paper and the wastebasket. Methinks too many stilled voices fear the incisiveness of the editorial tongue and distrust their ability to reply in kind. Poetry even of the worst sort brightens these dreary pages and though I know nothing of Scan or not to Scan myself I'll take a fling for the heck of it. It's good stuff to read.

But before sailing in where only angels dare tread let's do a once-over on the editorial, which this time gives the amateur and professional raconteur something to really think about. I'd like to mention the thing is well packed with thought and each sentence alone can be broken down and examined with profit to the examiner. A quick reading just didn't give me everything I'd like to get out of it.

Of especial interest was the mentioning of the fact that authors even of the past have hewed to the method of narrating a yarn in terms of the Royalty Viewpoint. It's always been Cinderella, male or female. In old Europe a book without dukes and kings and princes just didn't sell—but let's not forget Charles Dickens who apparently made it his business to do otherwise.

It depends upon the school to which you belong. Either a man in his heart desires personal power or in his heart a man desires anything *but* personal power. Let the psychologists take it from there. . . . I wish somebody would tell me outright what it is *I* want out of life. (Though all of us can understand about what we want to avoid. Perhaps avoiding things, instead of gaining things, is the answer.)

Let me suggest keeping it even—there are a lot of good stories yet to be written anent dictatorship et al and complete exclusion might discourage capable authors from submitting acceptable stuff. Enough of that.

On to poetry.

Outside the winds rise fierce and cold,
The clouds are there, their shoulders high.
Ne'er was such night—the whole house shakes.
The Vampires, Ghouls, the Ghosts are nigh!
Blackness, blackness, everywhere. Ho!
Fool and fan alone would seek
And brave the autumn blasts that chill
The bones. Iced hand that numbs leaves weak!

At last—a light through storm and mist
A beacon beck'ning from afar.
Yet closer we approach to find a sign:
SMOKE SMELLO, VERY BEST CIGAR!
The Newsman's gentle face, benign
Say's THRILLING WONDERS IN! Shine, Mr?
(Couldn't think of a suitable rime for benign.)

And so we take leave of the pleasant, dreamy isle of THRILLING WONDER STORIES as clouds slowly obscure the waving BEMs enter red pencil before it's too late.—*226 West 60th Street, Chicago 21, Illinois.*

*Remorseless Rodney, you malign,*
*E'en lacking rhyme for your "benign,"*
*This column's nobly reared design.*
*Therefore ourselves we shall assign*
*Your baseless motives to impugn*
*And label you a feckless gugn.*

Nonetheless, dear Rodney, we are still madly hunting occasionally and in the depths of darkness, something that will rhyme with "orange"—and as yet have been unable to make "tangerine," "kumquat" or "nectarine" do the trick. Next week we tackle the apple family.

## WOMEN'S WORLD
### by C. Stewart Metchette

Sir: For some time in fandom I have been aware of the efforts of some vampires (that's what they call themselves!) to delude the male fen. These femme fen claim to constitute a minority and they even go so far as to say that the contents pages of our many stf magazines are dominated by male authors!

This falsehood, circulated throughout fandom by a fanzine called 'Disaster's Tower'—for some unfathomable reason—must stop. Here is the true picture:

C. L. Moore is nearly always their first mentioned name of an author of the fair sex that is no longer writing. Well, in the December ish of TWS, they have an authoress whose first work justified the novel spot. I refer naturally to Mary Leinster, the newcomer to professional stf.

And cast your eyes down to the novelets. Here we have a good Luna yarn by L. Rhonda Hubbard, well known in love-pulps, and one Georgetta Smythe, also well known in the semi-technical confessions.

Even the hallowed region of the shorts—stories, that is—are invaded! Two female stf writers make their debuts—Fay Bradbury with her 'The Off Season' and Fredrika Brown with her effort, 'Knock'.

Out of 10 stories, the females have perpetrated five. That is a 50-50 division of acceptance checks. That is the truth, but in the next 'Disaster's Tower' there will probably be a 20-page tirade directed against the male fen in fandom.

Speaking for the males in fandom, I advocate the presentation of more male stf authors like that sterling duo Lee Brackett & Cecil Moore. We males are being outnumbered in fandom by the females! To arms!

The fact that Slan van Vogt is going to run in the next TWS moves me to almost send you a subscription. And when do we get more Kuttner? and Bradbury? and McDowell?—*3551 King Street, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.*

Stewart, you had better pick out some nice man with an income and get married—we mean it. What does the C-initial in your name stand for anyway—Clara or perhaps Castoret?

But you have only uncovered half of the feminist conspiracy in the December TWS. How about Charlene Harness, Nola Loomis, Benay Miller, Joanne MacDonald or Frances Long—to say nothing of Orla Tremaine? Man, you ain't but just hardly scratched the surface.

## CREAM OF THE CROP
### *by someone-who-gave-his-address-but-forgot-to-sign-his name*

Dear Ed: This is my first letter to TWS altho I have been reading the mag over two years now. The

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elimination of Sarge Saturn and his cohorts, the introduction of a sane and thoughtful editor's column, the expanded TRS have all played a major part in lifting TWS to the top in its particular field.

Now if Bergey's Blatant Blotches were dispensed with, your mag would be just about perfect. Scientifiction has come of age but Bergey is an atavism, a throwback to the old "Gawd, The Martians is a'comin'. Git out the spaceships and we'll blast hell out of 'em or die tryin" days.

Can you get Robert Gibson Jones to do a cover for you? That would be a nice Xmas present. My favorite artist is Finlay, but he doesn't do too good a job on covers.

Henry Kuttner is your top author but only on the long lengths. He doesn't seem to have mastered the art of the short story as yet.

During the time I have read your mag you have printed many fine stories. Ten years from now you should reprint the following stories in the HOF. They are the cream of the crop.

1. I am Eden.....Kuttner
2. The Star of Life.....Hamilton
3. Travelers Tale.....Whitley
4. Lands of the Earthquake.....Kuttner
5. Way of the Gods.....Kuttner
6. Jerry Was A Man.....Heinlein
7. And The Moon Be Still As Bright.....Bradbury
8. Call Him Demon.....Hammond
9. Piety.....St. Clair
10. The Moon That Vanished.....Brackett

There have been many others. Get Bradbury to do a lead novel for you if you haven't already. Get St. Clair to do a series of articles for you picturing the earth far in the future (possible inventions, social life, recreations, all the little things that go to make up the complex pattern we call life). Give her imagination full sway. I think I've got a good idea here Ed. How about it?

I am in favor of giving the original of an illustration for the best letter in one ish. It would stimulate your letter writers to better things. Let's have some action on this one way or the other.

The December issue was below par. No, I didn't mean that. I—well, you see, I'm a golf devotee so when I say you're below par I really mean you're above par. Do I make myself clear? Thought not.

"A Horse On Me" was a joke on me. Didn't think it was going to be any good but it was. This series has endless possibilities, don't you think? How about a story sending Prem (I prefer Spam) and Stieve back to Lady Godiva's time? *That* I would like to see on audeo video, especially video.

At first I thought Hubbard's story was gonna be another one guy saves the earth story. Then it turns out the whole business was a dream. Is that an improvement over the former? Bah! Old Man Hubbard's cupboard was certainly bare this time.

The rest of the stories were good but why the preponderance of tales with a child as the main character? One precocious brat can foretell the future, one can summon the glowing ones across the depths of space, and the other can become a schizophrenic physically. Who says our younger generation is going to the dogs? Certainly no scientifiction reader.

Hey, Rick, are you going high-hat on us or sumpin'? Richard, no less. Recently, I was perusing some back issues of TWS and SS and came upon a letter written by one Rick Sneary. There wasn't a misspelled word or a hopelessly mixed up sentence in the whole thing and yet you say he doesn't misspell on purpose. What goes? Particularly liked your answer to Ricardo de George's poem. How do you do it?

I just got up enuff courage to look at Bergey's cover. Not bad. Subdued and dignified but I know he'll be back in the same old rut next ish so I won't wax enthusiastic.

I read somewhere that you were a Braves fan. Haw. Wait'll next year, bub. They won't lose the series then. They won't even be in it. Just watch those Lipless Dodgers.

I see where you're bringing out "Super Science" again. Include a good long letter section in it and you'll make all us fans happy.

I hope you print my letter. I'd like to join the boys in the back room. What'll you have boys? A monthly TWS? I thought so. Well. ED?—*25 Beacon Street. Middletown. N. Y.*

**It's probably a good thing you didn't sign your name since you choose to congratulate us on reviving SUPER SCIENCE. The credit for that job belongs to a totally different publishing house. As for Sneary, we simply got tired of editing his letters to the point of exhaustion and complete rewrite—especially as they were more entertaining au naturel. So we let them go through as was.**

What league did you say those Lipless, hitless Dodgers were in ? We also know all about par—though not from any close acquaintance with same. Closest we ever came to it was years ago at Dedham when a kindly old doctor stopped our overlong second shot on the green with his chest, enabling us to miss a putt for an eagle three by half an inch. That's close enough, isn't it?

Your all-time list is a good one—but as you say there have been and are many others. Don't know about St. Clair on articles—believe her husband is the non-fiction member of the writing family. As for Bradbury, he is supposed to be in work on a novel—we hope.

## ALIAS KUTTNER
### by Dirk Schaeffer

Ed, ed, help! Quick, ed, you gotta help. There's no time to lose. I'm disgraced. I don't dare show my face to any of my pals any more. And it's all your fault!! Why? you ask, why? I'll tell you why. It's those darned letters you print in your TRS column. Every second one of them (at least) mentions HanK's various pen-names—and—and I don't know one solitary one of them and my friends won't talk to me and I've been feeling awful ever since I bought your dirty, old mag. Please help me, ED.

Seriously, though, thanks in advance and let me make myself unpopular among your readers in this very simple way: I don't approve one little bit of Bergey's fair maidens in scanty costumes. With pictures like Bergey's on your covers people get misprehem—prehen—the wrong idea about stf. They think mags like TWS and SS print mainly stories rivaled only by Katherine Winsor.—*803 West Center Street Alma, Michigan.*

Who is Katherine Winsor—a pen-name, perhaps, for the fair Kathleen? As for Henry Kuttner—he sometimes writes under the nom de plume of C. I. Moore.

## GOLLIWOGS, YET!
### by Sylvester Brown, Jr.

Dear Editor:

To Snyders, Zimmers, Rivenes, and Wichendens:
Those Stevens gals were Atlantean courtesans.
Great galloping golliwogs!
What do you want, frizzled frogs?
Or scenes like East Lupton, Vermont
With tires an ammoniacal font?
Or perhaps you'd like a scene or two
Where birds and bees are strictly taboo.
And of cheesecake we'll ne'ermore see a shred
On a beautiful TWS double-spread.
If Clark, Strickler and G. Brown have their way,
TWS will surely see such a day.
Heaven forbid
Such a lack of id!
These fans must resemble the Burrowers of Tenn
Or the old proverbial angry wet hen. . . . .
Pornography in mags is strictly passé;

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Postal Laws make it that way.
So Stevens and Finlay are *artists* not fiends;
The authorities say so up above two leens.

To Mrs. Firestone—If Bradbury wrote a Defeatist story, and such story was entitled *The Earth Men;* then, by syllogism, the editor is a schnorkle. This conclusion is patently absurd, as schnorkles are not even remotely related to macaronis.—*65 Gordon Street, Allston Massachusetts.*

You plaster Zimmer, Clark, Rivenes
For hating hard our cover scenes
But, dear Sylvester, blue of jeans,
While knocking fandom's kings and queens
A mystery verse unweens
Just what in hades are "two leens?"

We are no schnorkle, by syllogism or anything else. We can't even write under water, much less breathe under it. Did I hear someone whisper that we cannot write anywhere else either? No prompting from the audience, please!

## ABANDONED CLAPTRAP
### by George W. Hodes

Dear Editor: Congratulations on a fine issue, but it took more than just a fine issue to bring me out of hibernation sufficiently long to write a letter. I am speaking, of course, of the editorial. The clear thinking demonstrated therein lit for me the white candle of hope for the whole field of science-fiction. In abandoning the claptrap which for so long adorned the pages of TRS you have made a great step forward. Let's keep moving in the same direction.

At the same time please note that I am not proposing a dry and deadly-serious TRS. Most of your readers and by far the greater part of your ardent fans are teen-agers, in which group I include myself. The reason for this is simple. Youth has an imagination as yet unfettered by the exigencies of earning a living. We (or at least I) read the letter section to be entertained, not educated. The ideal situation is of course to do both, and if you can accomplish this with the material you receive well and good.

But in the very recent past you have been plagued with a great many letters which tried terribly hard to be humorous, with unfortunate result. I'll tell you why in one simple sentence. They got printed.

Joe Blow read the letter column and wanted to get one of his own printed. Seeing the type that made the grade, Joe sat down to a typewriter and knocked himself out trying to be screamingly funny. If he succeeded after a fashion the letter got printed. If not, the message was cast into the lower darkness. (i.e., the waste-basket.)

There was, of course, nothing *you* could do about this state of affairs except pick out the best of the lot and try to fit yourself into the trend. Pardon me—I'll take that back. You *did* do something because TRS *has* changed. What it was and how you managed it I don't know but at any rate, roses to you for a skillful job of leading.

Let me use this small space to put in my bid for continued and longer comments on the letters. They make the readers' page. I'll even be big and let you throw this one away to make room.

Now let's run through a few of the stories. Briefly, because I realize no one really cares about my opinions except me.

*THE GHOST PLANET* A bit of Swift-ish satire here. Leinster built a neat psychological trap, which same was sprung with a snap on page 39, line 27. Characters trite, but convincingly done.

*240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP* This one had all the earmarks of a downright awful story, but for some reason I can't quite put my finger on managed to turn out pretty good.

*FRUITS OF THE AGATHON* This I regard as a really excellent story—brilliantly conceived, skillfully and delicately excuted. The characters lived. So much so that the plot seemed to be nothing more than the logical consequence of the characters created. The mark of a fine story.

*THE OFF SEASON* Ray's work always excels and my private opinion of him coincides exactly with your editorial one.

This could go on forever, but it won't. Who am I to criticize when I can't write as well as the worst of your authors myself? I know, because I've tried. None of my myriad tales have even been good enough to get by *me,* much less an editor's desk. So at least I am not like some of your readers, who apparently think a critic must always criticize.

So let's continue to let Joe express himself without feeling he has to be funny. His opinions are far better than his forced humor.—*733 North 14th Street Apt. 7, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

Okay, you make a nice point, George W. But we have no desire to outlaw either humor or wit from these pages. If we think something is funny—we'll run it. Likewise if we think it has solid critical virtues (are there any, papa?) or provocative ideas. We're far from the teen age ourselves (again praise Allah for that!) but we believe our purpose is to entertain, no matter what the level—philosophical, gizmoical, moot or humorous. Selah!

## ANOTHER PLEA FROM OVER SEA
### by Moh Hock Kim

Dear Sir: Being a keen reader of "Thrilling Wonder Stories" and its companion "Startling Stories," could you please favor me by publishing this in your next issue of your magazine which, through an indirect source *may probably* arrive in Singapore in about 4 or 5 months time.

Due to currency restrictions regarding the importation of American pulp magazines, I am unable to purchase regular issues of the T.W.S. and S.S. magazine. Therefore I appeal to readers of T.W.S. in Great Britain to help me by putting me on an yearly subscription of Thrilling Wonder Stories and Startling Stories for which, I shall recompense the good Samaritan in £ Sterling.

Readers who wish to extend a helping hand, to suggest or to make other arrangements regarding the above are requested to write to the above address as soon as possible.—I would also like to purchase from readers in Great Britain, who want to dispose of their back copies of the T.W.S. and S.S.—*40 Selegie Road, Singapore, British Malaya.*

Since Mr. Kim is the first Melanesian fan from whom we have heard, how about giving him a lift? Who knows? Perhaps a Raffles Road Science Fantasy Society might result.

## CONVENTIONAL MISS
### by Sara Brady

Dear Editor: HI! There! I'm one of the new Members of you Club. So I just thought that I'd drop you all a few lines. Well, now, I've got a proposion to make to you. Here it is; you've read about outher clubes having a convention at some certain town. So, Whynot this Club as well. Now I know that all or at least a lot of the members live a good ways from each other.

So, Why don't you have a get togather somewhere there in the west and see just what the others think about My idea. We could maybe have a big get togather in say Indianaplois, Indiana and just have one big time. OH! I know that a lot of the members couldn't come. But, on the other hand quite a lot of them could. I've just read a list of some of your mem-

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bers and there are some right practially at my frount door, So to speak.

When you and if you have your meeting out there you could elect a of delagates to come east or rather to the mid-west it would be. You could send a date for the big affair. When and what time—. There are several nice places for the members to stay over here. In Indianaplois there are about 35 or 40 different places to stay that are quite nice.

I can mane a few; The Claypool Hotel is one of the best. Then there is the "Sheffiel Inn, The Antlers Hotel" are nice. I can really recomend the Claypool Hotel because so many of the other Clubes have their get togathers there. It's really a nice place to stay. OH! then there's the "Muratt Hotel" it is THE best one of all.

It's where so many of the Movie Stars and Big cleberaties stay. Well I'll close for now. I'd like to hear what the rest of you all think about it.

You can contact me by Phone or Telegraph or letter. My Phone number is 136. Just call for sara Brady. All the home operators know me or my folks. So, I'll get the call reguardless.—*Brownsburg, Indiana.*

Well, since Sneary deigned not to write us this time, we'll have to accept Sara as his substitute. Not as sharp as to thought trains, perhaps, but definitely in there where the language is concerned. For your information, Sara, Cincinnati has already been selected as the site of next year's so-called World Science Fiction Convention—so you won't have far to go.

Some of you guys and/or girls get in touch with Sara and give her the dope.

## VITRIOL
### by W. L. H. Dickey

Dear Editor: I must confess,
I find your budding authoress,
Yclept The Zimmer, much inclined
To cultivate a narrow mind,
And, what is greater cause for mirth,
A narrow mind of little worth.

Didacticism, I aver
Is not too far removed from her,
Who, in a fit of pique or rage,
Seeks to destroy Walt Whitman's page,
And vilifies, as stuff and rot,
The lines of T. S. Eliot.

I may be crass, unknowing, bold,
With little learning, but I hold
That poetry, if genuine
Is not determined by a line
Of footed syllables, but lives
By virtue of the thought it gives.

La Zimmer, in her elfin way,
Brings us that artifact, Millay,
And, laying her before our door,
Says, "Here's a poet". I deplore
That person who a poet names
For form, for foot, for rhythmic games.

The magic in a poet's voice,
If it is there, sustains the choice
'Twixt sonnets, odes and threnodies,
Blank verse, free verse or what you please.
And he who varies from the norm,
May be in search of subtler form.

The weapons bigotry affords,
Too little thought, too many words,
Cannot prescribe a sunless place
For poets, nor can sword nor mace.
Poets are born, uncaged and free;
They are not ruled by such as we.

My ranting's done, my venom pours its last bright spate.—*425 Nelson Street, Sedro-Woolley, Washington.*

Well, W.L.H., since you've spatered
Us, we wish your verse were watered.
For surely silk, so done, has lustre
Your doggerel can scarcely muster.
Howe'er we can say, "Lucky we!
"Cast in the role of referee."

Let's you and Zimmer have it out
This may well be the long-sought bout
That those two Joes, Jersey and Lou,
Failed to provide both me and you
For though they fought like oxeous cattle
This one should be a wondrous battle.

Let's you and Zimmer lash away
Hand, foot and metre, what d'you say?
Left—right, her spondee is the best
She uppercuts an anapest
Then you land a trochaic hook
The Astra maid finds hard to took.

The winner? Well let's wait and see
The outcome's moot twixt you and she
But we'll be waiting in a fog
To see which one of you's top dog
We offer now a fat sow's purse
To whoe'er wins this duel in verse.

## SUE BE IT
### by Wilkie Conner

Dear Editor: O.k.—if you're sued, don't blame me! Yep, if some chap name of R. W. Johnson goes to see his lawyer, or straps on his whtz gun and comes a-shootin', don't blame me! You see, you ran *his* by-line on *my* letter! So, if Mr. Johnson doesn't like what I've written, hell will probably break loose in the plush-lined editorial sanctum at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16. (On second thought, maybe there isn't any R. W. Johnson. Maybe that's a pseudonym you dreamed up for a gag because my (alleged) letter let off a blast about author's pen names . . . the idea being my letters would still stink, no matter what name was signed to 'em!)

Speaking of pen-names and editorial policies and what-not, here's a bit of an oddity that proves even seasoned magazine men *can* be wrong, at times. A friend of mine wrote a fantasy that was accepted by a well-known pulp. When the story was published, it was given a feature position and also the cover illustration.

However, my friend's name wasn't on the cover; just the title of the yarn. In the same issue, the yarn was plugged several times, and a short biography was carried on the author. The author had had several articles published in some of the bigger slicks but that was his first fiction effort. He was sort of upset to see his story mentioned on the cover, but his name not there.

So he politely queried the editor as to why. "Your name," wrote back the blue penciler, "doesn't mean anything commercially to this publication. When you have proven yourself, we will gladly run it on the cover." Since the magazine had already purchased two or three more stories, and since the author discovered the magazine's checks could be exchanged for steak and pork chops at his neighborhood grocery, he swallowed his pride and forgot about the matter.

Several months late, the magazine ran two of his stories in the same issue. The editor had dreamed up a pen name for one of the yarns. You guessed it! The totally unknown and unheard of pen-name was featured on the cover! Funny people, you editors!

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In The Reader Speaks, J. F. Barnes remarks: "I likewise am an author, having had a very good story turned down by a well known mystery magazine a while back." Since when does having ONE story turned down make a man an author? Geewhillickers, I wouldn't call myself an author and I've had stories turned down by every good publishing concern in the business.

Before you can refer to yourself as an author, J.F., first you gotta get one of those little do-hickeys editors scribble on with green ink that can be exchanged for beer and rum cokes and the other necessities of life—not those little papers that say, "We thank you for having permitted us to read the enclosed manuscript. Its return does not imply lack of merit. . ."

I sometimes wonder what an editor thinks when he picks up letters from his various readers and starts to put together a department such as The Reader Speaks? Does he stare at the stack of mail and mutter blasphemies in his beard? Or does he grit his teeth, bare his chest and say, "Oh well, what I gotta do, I gotta do?"

Most of the letters are so similar they could all have been written by the same guy. "I like this. I didn't like that. Why don't you murder whoosis . . . get a new artist . . . give us trimmed edges . . ." "Who drew that awful thing on page 000? Do you call *that* art?" And so on and et cetra. Just *what* does an editor think?

I especially enjoyed "World on a Pogo Stick," by F. Orlin Tremaine in the current TWS. (December, 1948) And I get a big kick out of your scientific fillers. Too bad they are staff written. They would be excellent means for us would-be authors to break into commercial print.

The Frying Pan department is proving to be a real entertainer. Well, toots, I'm definitely not going to comment on the stories! For the last year you have been running better and better yarns, so why should I write in every other month and tell you what you already know . . . or else you wouldn't have bought 'em?

I agree one hundred percent with your policy of refraining from running many of those "world conqueroring world-saving" stories. Now that science fiction is getting away from such things, it is going to get the place on the literary horizon it has so long deserved.—*1618 McFarland Avenue, Gastonia, North Carolina.*

You seem to have said several mouthfuls—enough to keep any contented cow's seven stomachs working overtime simultaneously—as well as to have come up with some embarrassing revelations. We humbly apologize for the by-line switch on your December epistle—don't know how it happened. It is always a temptation to switch some writer-inner's whole line of argument—making a rabid Merritt-fan come out for Kuttner or vice versa—but we have managed thus far to restrain ourselves against all such alluring inducements.

As for this cover-featuring business—well, anything can and usually does happen. Most of the possibilities have happened to you Ed. in his other and far humbler author's guise. And you should see our rejection slips. We'll offer them against anyone's.

We quite agree, however, that when it comes to commercial writing (what isn't?) it's only the checks that count—those that don't bounce, that is.

As for accusing us of thought when sitting down to write this column—please don't. It takes us days to achieve the proper vacuum needed to face the eager letter writers. Glad you like THE FRYING PAN. Some of the boys seem a trifle sensitive about it. But after the monthly shellacking we take in this and THE ETHER VIBRATES we maintain that we have a license to bite back, if mildly.

## MOBIUS MISS
### by Rickey Slavin

Dear Editor: The Dec. ish of TWS just hit the stands, and of course, the first thing I do after I read it is to send you a letter. I bet you appreciate the fact that this letter, for a change, is being typed. After the scrawls that come your way, a nicely typed letter is no doubt a novelty.

*The Ghost Planet.* . . .I don't like Leinster anyway, so the awful comment I have on this one doesn't signify much. It stank.

*240,000 etc.* . . .This, for a change was very good. L. Ron Hubbard has never been a favorite of mine, but this story in particular had a sort of charm. Ghod alone knows how to define the charm, but there it is.

*Fruits of the Agathon.* . . .Who is this Harness guy? This story is rather unorganized, but nevertheless it seems to have the basic concept of psychiatry presented in an enjoyable form. I liked it, even with all the mistakes, and errors in story formation. Since I dally in writing myself, I felt that I am qualified to say that.

*The Mobius Trail.* . . .Since you know my opinion of Gawje O. Smith, the only thing I can do is confine my comments to this particular piece. It is extremely good, sloppily brilliant, as is all of his work. If there were just a little more work done on it, it would qualify as really great. Unfortunately, good old GOS is a bit lazy about the details of a story, and it is a bit ragged around the edges.

*Schizophrenic.* . . Noel Loomishas hits a winning streak. With Mr. Z. . . and now this delightful tale about a mutant child. Lovely, lovely.

*A Horse On Me.* . . .As a writer, this is good. It takes no effort, no imagination, no ability. . . perfect for a writer. But, as a reader, muuurrrder. Does it pollute the air! Not a chuckle in a carload.

*A Child is crying.* . . .Very good. 'Nuf sed.

*The Off Season.* . . .Bradbury is one of my favorite people. Unfortunately, although I like the Ray of today, where is the guy who wrote Million Year Picnic, et al? Oh how I loved him then.

*Knock.* . . .Superb. To my insane sense of propriety, this hits the perfect note. I have liked Brown a long time.

*Fuzzy Head.* . . It seems that the short stories this time outrate the novels etc. Very good.

I am glad to see the fine ability of F. Orlin Tremaine once again gracing the pages of your sterling (plated) magazine. It seems quite a while since we saw him editorializing in the pages of your chief rival. Almost a decade, to be exact.

The event of the year has occurred. Not content with snatching from under our very noses the rest of your rival's crew, now you take the best. Van Vogt is here, all ye shall worship him. Of course, you will blue-pencil this, but I think you should perk up your vest, for the commendations that come pouring in. I think your mag is the best on the market, bar none. So put that in your rocket and shoot it.

I am saying this, taking into consideration the slick paper, the high class, the snide comments of the other pubs about pulps. I say for a pulp you have done pretty damn good. Glick and Mahzel. . . .translation . . .loads of luck and if you let down and stop giving us the best, I shall be very hurt.—*6126 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn 30, New York.*

There seems to be no comment to make on this one save thanks. So, thanks, Rickey, thanks a lot.

We have, however, stolen no authors from nobody. Those that have come in have done so on their own initiative.

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## BEEF
### by Marvin Williams

Dear Editor: The laws of human nature require that I be delighted to see my name in print even if I didn't want it to be but it sorta peeved me after the novelty wore off. I write you a pathetic pleading little card begging you not print it for all fandom to see that I am a dope and you incriminate me anyway by printing the card. Ya can't win. Thanks anyway though for not running the letter.

Now, since I have gotten that out of the way I shall pass comment on the DEC. TWS.

SUBJECT no. I: The Cover

COMMENT ON Subject: WOW! Now there is a babe. It, all in all, is a good cover. Too many names blocked in at the bottom but that can pass. Nice coloring all around and the hands were very realistic looking.

SUBJECT no. II: The Lead Novel

COMMENT ON Subject: Mildly sensational. Leinster's classic. He worked in the world government angle nicely. I know some people who are just about as nervy as Lan Hardy. I'm glad Drake got Kit.

SUBJECT no. III: Novelet, 240,000 Miles Straight Up

COMMENT ON Subject: A good sound yarn. It slightly peeved me, though, where he woke up and found it was all a dream.

SUBJECT no. IV: Novelet, Fruits Of The Agathon

COMMENTS ON Subject: Huh?

SUBJECT no. V: Novelet, The Mobius Trail

COMMENT ON Subject: Good yarn. Solid plot. Some dame, that Sally.

SUBJECT no. VI: Short Stories

COMMENT ON Subject: All readable. They rate like this:

Best—Schizophrenic
2nd—Knock
3rd—The Off Season (This one got me)
4th—A Child Is Crying
5th—Fuzzy Head
6th—A Horse On Me

SUBJECT no. VII: Illustrations

COMMENT ON Subject: All good except the 58 job for Loomis. Napoli is a R-A-N-K amateur. The Stevens drawings for THE GHOST PLANET.

THIS I can't subjectize. Too much to say. I think Lin Carter had the best letter. He is on de griddle. Sneary should worry, I'll never have any fame. His will never wane though, anyway. He has made an unerasable mark upon stfandom. Rickey Slavin's letter sounds on the ball but that, oh that Letterhead. DJINN RICKEY. It reeks of corn. Please, oh please don't ever do a thing like that to my letters. They are bad enough as they are.—*431 2nd Avenue S. E., Cedar Rapids, Iowa.*

We tried to cook up a nice little letterhead for you but somehow Marvin Williams is almost as elusive as a rhyme with "orange"—so we gave it up for the nonce. Sooner or later, however. . . .

It's nice to have our little services appreciated—as in the suppressing of your letter. You can always depend upon us for such little kindnesses—such as pulling chairs from under companions, wings and legs from passing insects and any stray goatees.

## EUREKA!
### by Meyer Weisman

Dear Sir: After reading the recent issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, I turned back, as was my want, and re-read those stories which particularly intrigued me. It being late, and no other reading matter readily available, I sullenly turned to the small print, in this manner discovering there was such a thing as Fan Mail and Editor's Comments; also, the deplorable condition of a paucity of Original Plots and a plethora of atom busters.

This gave me an idea of a worthwhile variation, if not an original plot. A dire intellect conceives of making the atom bigger—they become so big that there is a housing shortage in the universes. That's the worthwhile variation. And that's where the inevitable atom buster, in the shape of a subconsciously relative super outer galaxy mind, comes in, and starts to split THOSE atoms. AM I SCARED! Of course not. *Thrilling Wonder Stories* will be able to cope with the situation.

I have been reading magazines since the age of five, but a passage in Benj. Miller's story comes close to being the best I ever read—an example of his inimitable humor and wit—where the cave girl, in justifying the price of $40.00 for a meal, quotes Reg Prem as follows: "He say, when tourists not gypped, they feel gypped."

This was worth a couple of light years' subscription to any magazine. We have inflation, and are not big subscriptions now in order as well as big atoms?

It is not good form to conclude a letter with an interrogation mark. So I will say—congratulations.—*732 Barlum Hotel, Detroit, Michigan.*

We got a story the other day which had a neat line in it—we won't give you the build-up, Meyer, but it paid off with, "There's no fuel like an oil fuel." You should go for that one too. As for your emperor-size atom, we'll put Ray Cummings to work on it. He seems to have a sort of affinity for such items.

## THROW HIM TO THE IONS
### by S. S.

*With much witty salutation,*
*Many writers of this nation*
*Pen erratic gyration*
*To the Thrilling Wonder station.*

*Their instatic deviation*
*From the path of concentration*
*Yields intense appreciation*
*Of the current situation.*

*Their amazing derivation*
*Of the truth from wild sensation*
*Is a mighty revelation*
*To the silent population.*

*In our humble adulation,*
*Stay we mute with adoration,*
*While each TRS legation*
*Flays its foes' evaluation.*

*—Warren, Ohio.*

*Had we any precognition*
*Of this doggerel attrition*
*You have put on exhibition*
*We'd have stepped on our ignition.*

*But we had no intuition*
*Not a word of admonition*
*That your poetic ambition*
*Would bring such a parturition.*

*Faced with such a dire fruition*
*Lacking any ammunition*
*We can only wish perdition*
*On you, son of malnutrition!*

Okay, go on and starve to death! And next time sign your full name—if you still dare.

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## NO PIX FOR HIM

### by Elliott M. Braverman

Dear Editor: When I started reading TWS and SS about five years ago, I resolved not to become a letter-hack, but I've got something I want to get off my chest. In almost every issue, in the Reader Squeaks, there have been arguments pro and con the quality of the illustrations in your mag.

I personally think the pics are pretty sad, but that's not my point. Why not eliminate all illustrations? If I couldn't imagine bigger and betters BEMS than your present "artists" draw I'd be in a bad way. Also I don't buy the magazine for the pictures of girls that abound within it. I buy science fiction magazines for the occasional good stories they possess.

Perhaps if you cut out the illustrations you'd have enough money to tempt your authors to put down their comic books and write some good stories for a change. It may be because I've got a year of college composition and literature behind me, but I just can't get excited about the stories you are currently publishing. Take the Dec. issue of TWS for example. The lead novel was *The Ghost Planet*. It was the same pattern. As soon as the girl entered the picture I knew Tom would get her. He did.

*240,000 Miles Straight Up*. Oh brother! Dreams again.

*Fruits of the Agathon*. Could have written a good story about Toring the Freudian, but he didn't. The story is poorly written and filled with pseudo-scientific gibberish that added nothing to the plot.

*The Mobius Trail*. It was not a new idea and neither the author nor his characters had much imagination.

*Schizophrenic*. Good idea, weak story.

*A Horse on Me*. How could you possibly publish tripe like this?

*The Off Season*. Somebody may have liked it.

*Knock*. Best story in the entire issue. That's not saying much.

*A Child is Crying, Fuzzy Head*. I took a term of genetics and once asked the professor about the effects of the atomic bomb radiations on the genes and future appearance of the Japanese race. He told me that if it has any effect at all, it will not begin to appear for at least six thousand (or maybe he said sixty thousand) years. Aside from that, the first story was readable.

That's about all I have to say. Usually the mag is pretty good, but this issue was below par. Oh yes, I have about a hundred or so scientifiction magazines of all descriptions knocking around the house. If anybody wants some, let me know.—*1284 Commonwealth Avenue, Allston, Mass.*

Here's an idea—why not cut out pieces of paper and paste over the illustrations before you read the next issue. Then the pictures wouldn't disturb your appreciation of the stories—if you are capable of same. Judging by the above, we wonder.

## IS HE THE ONE?

### by Ray Johnson

Dead Editor: I was a reader of Thrilling Wonder Stories even before they were officially considered "Thrilling." Having therefore contributed to the Editor's girth and means for many years I think that by now I too should have a right to express an opinion on the tell-tale grey pages of said magazine.

This then is a personal opinion.

I have observed with growing consternation the stylistic changes apparent in recent issues. In the December 1948 issue I find not one but three stories of the typical precocious infant type, Schizophrenic. A Child is Crying, and Fuzzy Head, it seems that one can find one of these in every issue of every sf magazine on the market.

Wondering as to the nature of the persons able to find a constant deluge of such tales to their taste I have come to the conclusion that they must be either persons of Mr. Wigodsky's age who would like to imagine themselves as super infants, frustrated women without children or discouraged mothers with stupid children who wish that they possessed the geniuses in diapers depicted in these stories.

To my liking I found the masterful tale by L. Ron Hubbard, always one of my favorite authors. Following that, respectively, the stories by Fredric Brown, Murray Leinster, Ray Bradbury, George O. Smith and Charles L. Harness.

I do not mean to state that I thought that any of these constituted a classic. With the exception of Knock by Fredric Brown, who apparently can write only above-average stories, they were average stories for the authors mentioned. (i.e. good.)

Although this will alienate me from many of the pseudo-intellectuals, who read science fiction to find the meaning of it all, I would like to see an occasional good space-opera in preference to many of the types of stories now current.

I have long suspected that one of the many causes of these recent changes was the fact that the late Sergeant Saturn did not leave as suspected, but was assassinated by a supposedly loyal cohort known as Wart Ears, who, now aided by another once-thought loyal follower of the Sarge, one Frog Eyes (heading an NKVD operated by grulzaks), dictates the present editorial policies.

Again this was only a personal opinion, which supposedly I am entitled to even in *Thrilling Wonder Stories.—3835 North Central Park, Chicago 19, Illinois.*

If this were the old days, we would be screaming for doughnut guns to ray the entire Chicago 19 district. But seeing as how it isn't the old days, we'll merely sigh and pass on to the next. One question though, Ray—*are* you the R. W. Johnson who got Wilkie Conner's letter published erroneously under his by-line in last December's TRS? If so, don't let it happen again. When bigger bucks are passed, your Ed. will pass 'em.

## OPEN MIND

### by Larry Rothstein

Dear Ed: This is the first letter I have ever sent to either TWS or SS, but I felt as though I should after reading the December issue of TWS. I have been a S-F fan for 20 years and have never had very much to say about the stories I have read in that period but I do want to agree with you on your comments about one world dictatorships, benevolent or otherwise.

However, it must be realised that the worth of a story depends far more on the author's approach to his subject than on the subject itself. I think that men like Van Vogt, Henlein Sturgeon, Hubbard, etc. can write a good story about most any S-F idea.

It is true, I think, that many authors ruin this type of story because they neglect the effects of the sum total of the causes of the dictatorship they set up. We mustn't forget that many authors have written excellent stories on this subject which were excellent because the sociological development of the era was well thought out before being put on paper.

I would like to make a few comments on the stories in this issue. Leinster's story was good except for a very poor characterization job on Lan Hardy. I knew he was going to be the villain after the first ten paragraphs past his introduction. Let's be sensible about this sort of thing and remember that people are very rarely complete idiots.

For my money, the best story in the issue was the short by Long. There was as fine a job of saying everything that had to be said about a situation in a few words as I have ever read. The rest of the stories were about even in quality, not exceptional but good, with one very personal exception.

I have yet to read a humorous S-F story that was really funny except one or two by L. Sprague deCamp. Miller's stuff leaves me cold but as it is only my own feeling on the subject, I refuse to request his removal from your pages. I will continue to read them because

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I can't help reading everything between the covers of any S-F magazine.

One more thing before I close. Covers should illustrate some scene in a story or should have no connection with anything inside. BEMs have a place but not with bathing beauties. Those artists who combine the two should realise that environments conducive to BEMs would probably be extremely unhealthy for any terrestial not enveloped in a very conservative space suit. Question; where in "Fruits of the Agathon" is the scene on the cover?

Thanks for bearing with me this far and remain assured that S-F and I are inseparable companions. *—204 East College Avenue, State College, Pennsylvania.*

You're right, of course, in querying our position on "dictatorship" stories, Larry. Actually, it is far from unequivocal. If we get a good enough story about anything—whether it fits magazine "policy" or is dead set against not only such "policy" but all of the accepted humanities at once—we'll buy it like a shot. But we revolted against the dictatorship and world-saving stories in general with good cause—they have simply been beaten to death by the typewriters of all the authors who have hung around such themes as assiduously as idlers around a pool hall.

We can't argue with you on humor. A thing either hits you funny or it doesn't. By the way, we purchased a new de Camp howler only recently. As for covers, when we cannot find a suitable cover spot in a lead story, it is customary to get together with the art department and work out a "symbolical"—attempting to achieve a decorative suggestion of the story rather than illustrate it. The December cover was one of those.

## BLEAK AND BITTER

### by Richard R. Smith

Dear Editor: This is my first letter to TRS and it is written with a tinge of bitterness because you rejected my first manuscript to your mag! You can't do this to a guy that reads three monthly, four bi-monthly and one seasonal stf magazines! However, I admit the story was lousy and I shall try to do better.

In the meantime (while I am doing better) leave us discuss Dec. TWS. This ish gave me a shock. The night before I bought the mag, I saw the cover of a new stf mag on my favorite newsstand in a dream! Then, the very next day, there is Dec. TWS! How come, Ed? Telepathic ads?

Here are my opinions of the novel and novelets, putting the ones I liked best, first:

THE MOBIUS TRAIL: This wins out on good writing and realism, so forth and so on. A good story although it sounded like a detective story in spots.

FRUITS OF AGATHON: Almost got first place. It had imagination, intelligence but it almost left me crying. Is Harness merely morbid or is the future really going to be so mechanical and drab?

240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP: I put off reading the story because I thought I wouldn't like it but I did. However, does control of the moon mean control of the earth? Suppose they did send atomic rockets from the moon, couldn't we stop them with counter-attacking rockets from the Earth?

THE GHOST PLANET: The story seemed dull and unreal to me but that might be because I read it in a hurry. Leinster has talent though! I just finished reading his "THE MAD PLANET" in another mag (no names, Ed!) and it was really good. It had description, suspense, everything! Murray's REGULATIONS, however, I thought was awful. Could be the ole' Murray has trouble with plot?

My opinions (if you want them) of the short stories, in order of which I liked most:

THE OFF SEASON: Bradbury gets around doesn't he? Try to pick up a stf mag that doesn't have him in it! How about a novelet or something longer than shorts? Bradbury is too good to stick to short stuff. Right now, he seems to be concentrating on Mars. This is his third story in a row that is about Mars! I forgive him tho, because, looking over my list of plots, I see that almost all my short stuff is about time machines! Must be some rut the mind gets in!

KNOCK: It had me blushing. Is this the same Fredric Brown that had a detective story published? If so, three cheers for versatility!

A CHILD IS CRYING: This was good. His theories about the future constantly changing are good.

SCHIZOPHRENIC: Two child-mutations in one story? The ed should blush in shame.

FUZZY HEAD: Awful. But don't blame Long. It was a bad subject. How about something like Long's "Humpty Dumpty Had A Great Fall"? That was a masterpiece! Long can do much better than his "Time Trap" in another mag and his "Fuzz" in this ish!

A HORSE ON ME: This Miller talks about time like it was something that you could abuse. Doesn't he know anything about the time-material stream? Doesn't he know the past would influence the future? Fooey! I also don't like the way he makes light of stf. Its very good that you try to get variety but realize that stf IS the variety! If we wanted to laugh, we wouldn't look for a funny stf story, we'd look for a comic book, or something. I'm glaaaah I said it!

The pics: The cover by Earle was good although I didn't see what section of the story it represented and who cares? Virgil Finlay is a genius. Is he twins? I don't see how he manages to do so many illustrations.

WORLD ON A POGO STICK: I felt like this guy was talking to me all the time. The three thought-centers sound logical. I just hope that my thought-center that wants to be a writer can win over the thought-center that wants to be a business man.

TRS: Nick Wickenden likes Jick and OOna. Personally, I thing that "ROTO-HOUSE" was just the type of story that an unimaginative married woman could write. I think that most married women and women alone have no sense of adventure. They mostly are concerned with security and—love. Witness: ROtohouse. The thing was about a simple house, no adventure in the story, no suspense, it wasn't funny, it wasn't sad, . . . say . . . what was the thing about?

Women can do much better. Leigh Brackett (I think she is a woman) has written two very good stories: "THE MOON THAT VANISHED" and "THE BEAST JEWEL OF MARS" I enjoyed both of those stories. Being a woman hasn't destroyed her sense of adventure!

If this letter sees black of print, I would like to correspond with anyone else interested in stf.—*6 East 44th Street, Wilmington 26, Delaware.*

Skipping your various early pulings, let's concentrate on your cracks about women, Dick. When you include married women alone in your indictment for lack of "adventure" you seem to have caught the whole sex in your seine. What do you mean by adventure? Going out in the woods and shooting at a lot of animals that can't shoot back?

The late Tommie Hitchcock, one of the greatest sportsmen and, on his record in two World Wars and the polo field, one of the greatest adventurers, always refused to go hunting—claiming he'd be glad to go if the birds or animals had weapons as good as his and could use them as well. He made most others in his crew look like pretty sick specimens. And he'd have felt the same way on

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Mars or Venus. If other men lack his ethical standards, well, they rate neither excuses nor sympathy. It's all right to kill living creatures to protect farmland or for needed food —but it simply isn't sport.

As for adventure—you seem to imply that love isn't adventure. Something tells us that you'll find out differently at almost any moment or you're going to lead an awfully dull life.

## ON THE WHOLE

### by Virgil Utter

Dear Editor: While lolling around for the past many days waiting to get into the Air Force (no kiddin'!), I managed to read every last page of the December TWS. On the whole I found it a very satisfactory issue, but the fact remains that there was only one story *outstanding:* Perhaps I'm living too much in the good old days just before the War when stf was at an all-time peak (or seemed so) or perhaps it's just that all the story ideas nowadays are mere extensions of old *themes, but it seems almost that stf has reached a* period of stasis.

Possibly we need another Weinbaum, or another Merritt or another Verne to pep things up with some new points of view. Let's see what we *do* have. There's Kuttner, who is, by popular acclaim, recognized as the tops of his field today. Sometimes I wonder, "Will the man never run down?" We hope not! And van Vogt, who of late has been over-glorified due to his one or two great stories (*Slan* and *Asylum*). Glad to see he's getting another Isher yarn out—it's a fine series.

Heinlein is plenty good, but what's become of him? Since the war, I've only seen four or five stories under his name. And Hubbard, whose story in the current issue, though finely written, was a dismal failure due to the weak ending. But, International Politics being what they are, it may have been the wisest ending.

Other than those luminaries, plus a few others, I find very few authors with outstanding talent. Certainly none of the new names show much promise at present of ever becoming any brighter than they are. As for the remedy for the situation, like many another critic before me, I have none. New blood? Naturally that's always needed, and you're doing well in attempting to develop some of the younger aspirants.

New ideas? Possibly, and certainly we can get clear of world-saving and atomic Earth destruction for a while. Bradbury's yarn flopped on that account. Although he says he's going to scare H . . . out of us during the next few years, atomic catastrophe doesn't effect me much anymore. It's a time-worn plot *already.*

It remains that the best story of the issue was "Fruits of the Agathon." Harness developed a plausible background very thoroughly and neatly in only a short space, though the plot was a bit top-heavy with characters for a story of that length. I'm proud of your having printed a fine story like this.

"A Horse on Me" places second. The first Orig Prem story I've read, and I enjoyed it very much. Certainly anyone who can write stf in a humorous vein deserves a big hand. Miller has my vote for a continuation of the series.

Tremaine's article was evidently slanted directly at the Kindergarten crowd, but even so, you should have given them credit for more intelligence. Come right down to it, what did he say in the article? If anyone finds he said anything conclusive, I'd appreciate knowing what. I did like (!) the illustration, however. Bergey?

The remainder of the contents you can put in a box and tie with a ribbon, except, of course, the book and fanzine reviews. No comment on the pictures except that I'm glad to see Finlay getting steady employment. And even the cover was an improvement.

My comments haven't been very nice this time (no, I ain't a frustrated SAPzine publisher), but I will mention again that there is an over-all improvement in TWS as well as SS, and I'll keep buying till you become perfect, and even after.—*Rt. 5, Box 1004 A, Modesto, California.*

You've got a good point, Virgil. New authors—good ones or even potentially good ones have been mighty hard to come by of late. We can think of Charles L. Harness and Margaret St. Clair and perhaps one or two others—but too many young writers come up with a good story or two, then submit a few misses as they wear out their first story veins and must learn to develop others—then get discouraged and quit. Writing is one of the toughest jobs on earth—fiction writing that is. Too many talented folk consider it a soft snap. It's a lot tougher than law or medicine or any of the other so-called "real" professions. Good luck in the Air Force.

## PEN-NAMES AGAIN

### by Robert A. Rivenes

Dear Editor: The letter by R. W. Johnson in the Dec. TWS suggests another subject that I can say nothing about. There are two sides to every question and the one on pen-names is no exception. Johnson touched the subject very lightly. My biggest objection to pen-names is that I may be missing stories written by a favorite author which appear in an outside magazine.

If Ray Bradbury is guilty of this practice I will have Robert Bloch sic Enoch on him. There can be, however, valid reasons for pen names. But if an author is ashamed to have his name appear two centimeters to the right of a Bergey beauties charms he should be writing for LHC. Also, a reader would tend to discredit a writer's work if he found out he was reading the work of one author instead of three.

When a fan turns pro a necessary precaution against dissection by other fans is a pen-name. Contrary to Johnson, Cornell Woolrich and William Irish have often appeared in the same pages in 'tec fiction much to the joy of the readers even though it is a well known fact that they are one and the same.

The Ghost Planet—Started out fine but it some bogged down. With a little more complications and more length it would have been fine. Everything was a little too pat. News events were good.

240,000 Miles Straight Up—The "And then I woke up" ending is not new but it still surprised me. It works particularly well in stf, where anything can and does happen. Pardon me. Anything but world saving. This would have been just that without the O. Henry ending. Could it be that editorial foresight saved us from that? The escape was too convenient and easy.

Schizophrenic—Oh goody. An infant's escapades. And atomic tinker-toys in action. This younger generation.

Fruits of the Agathon—Wild pitch. Over the catcher's head.

World on a Pogo Stick—Reminds me of the song that goes ". . . Or would you rather be a mule? . . ." with brains. Is Tremaine plugging *Borax?*

A Horse on Me—After the first few paragraphs, I stopped and said to myself, "This is a direct steal from the crummy thing about the Pilgrim's landing. Hey, wait a minute. It's the sequel. Imagine that. A sequel with nothing for it to seq! Oh well. But I must read it because I don't skip anything." So as to not completely waste my time, I turned on the radio and listened to "Twenty Questions". It helped.

The Off Season—The end of our world through the eyes of John Q. Public. The usual grand Bradbury except for the characterization of the Martians.

The Mobius—Smith didn't want anybody to not get the teleport principle. Three times and you're out. Good all the way.

A Child is Crying—Oh goody. An infant's escapades. Hit the spot.

Knock—Well knit. In this case the Snake was the



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hero. The real snakes were outsnaked. Score one for Brown.

Fuzzy Head—Oh goody. An infant's. . . . You get the idea by this time. More kid stories are wanted. Long seems to be on a Kiddy jag. Okey by me. "Pleasant dreams" indeed.

From the looks of this letter, my fingers went on a sympathy strike with the typesetters. Does this proofreading help?

If I read poems I might be qualified to suggest that you are Stanton Coblenz. But I don't, so I won't.

TRS—I seem to have run into the same trouble as Cox. That letter by Boob Rivenes was sure miserable. I'd say more if Montana wasn't a suburb of Oak Park. In the next issue BEM was explained no less than infinity to the infinity power times (how's that again?).

Pitchers were all pretty. Napoli has style.—*157 N. Euclid Ave., Oak Park, Illinois.*

Bob, please—the first Orig Prem story was not about the Pilgrims' landing. It was Columbus instead.

## THEY DON'T STAND UP— AND WHO WANTS THEM TO?

**by George Ebey**

Dear Editor: In a way the December TWS is a success. That is, the stories are good until one starts to analyze them and very few people must take the trouble. Not I, certainly; I analyzed one story and gave up. The story was by L. Ron Hubbard; it was called *240,000 Miles Straight Up*. Now in this story there was one main premise: if the USSR gets to the Moon before the USA then the USSR will attempt military domination of this planet.

(All right, cousin, you printed the story, presumably

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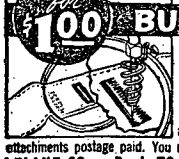

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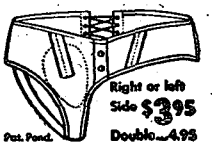

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without editorial censure. Kindly extend the same courtesy to this letter in which I propose to touch on this touchy subject just introduced into the magazine.)

Implicit in the premise is the alternate: the USA should get to the Moon before the USSR—and attempt military domination of the planet. I hope nobody is kidding themselves about that last. Putting a military base on that satellite and disavowing any desire to militarily dominate the world is equivalent to holding a loaded pistol to a man's head and saying, "My intentions are peaceful." As has been pointed out, a base on the Moon means supremacy for the nation that put it there. Period.

So I would call Mr. Hubbard's story a very irresponsible story indeed, indicating as it does, that the best way out of the present world impasse is to get that gun up to the other fellow's head. You see this country already has the "gun"—namely the A Bomb. At present we don't need to go to the Moon.

Most of the other stuff I liked, particularly Bradbury's masterful satire. Putting real people into unreal situations is a hard job for a writer but Ray does it beautifully.

Also impressive for its human values was *A Child is Crying*. When you print material like this you are doing a service to the field while supplying genuine entertainment to your readers. MacDonald's portrait of a mutant is one of the best yet.

I like the new departments, particularly the fanzine review. Come to think of it, tho, it must be troublesome to avoid duplication of same in *Startling*. I imagine that you'll be concentrating on the various "association" fanzines from now on—not having space for them in *Startling*.

Your editorials are invariably interesting even tho I seldom agreed with them. You *do* seem to be trying to keep up with the times—fictional excursions into current problems are a little more difficult as witness *240,000 Miles Straight Up.—4766 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland 19, California.*

As we have already stated—Hubbard's story was a *dream*—and the dream of a not particularly high-level-intellect officer at that. So pull 'em in. As for picking on the "association" fanzines only, in THE FRYING PAN, that would indeed by unsporting. Sitting ducks and all that.

## SARCASTIC, AIN'T HE?

### by Joseph Hammer

Dear Sir: Since I haven't written you before, perhaps I'd better begin by saying that I think you put out a damned good science-fiction magazine. I also think you must have been blind drunk when you bought F. Orlin Tremaine's little sermon.

I know Tremaine from 'way back. He put out a damned good science-fiction magazine too, but he can't write for beans. I have read the first provocative special feature in Tremaine's fascinating series carefully, reacting something like this:

*People are scared of nuclear fission.* Well, well. *What a man can't understand, he fears.* Imagine that! *The Chinese are an ancient people.* Gosh! *Their habits and philosophy contain an ancient wisdom.* Gee whiz! *We can always learn by observation.* Hmmm. *I suspect that science-fiction represents the avocation of many of us.* Or, in other words, *This article is being published in a science-fiction magazine.*

Okay, I'll do some observing. I note first of all that the opus begins with a metaphor that should have been blocked. Continuing, I find that the article is written throughout in the style of an extemporaneous address delivered to the Lions Club of Hood River, Oregon. I encounter two—count them, two—jokes which I wish I had never heard before. Eventually I begin to keep a weather eye out for whatever information Tremaine has to convey. I find it, heavily insulated with more F. O. T. profundities (. . . *The train was not a mystery to the inventors . . . or the engineers . . .* and *You and I have dreamed about space travel),* in these words:

"(The machine age) became a part of life so that, by



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the time the grandchildren of these men were born, the *machine age* was an *expected environment*. . . . That means their nervous systems *inherit* the adjustments made to environment by their parents and grandparents. . . . It will require at least three more generations before the roar of the city and the constant hum of machinery becomes an *expected environment* of the newborn children."

This at least is very interesting; startling, in fact. When I went to school, acquired characteristics were not inherited. If there's reliable evidence to the contrary, I'm glad somebody told me about it. But who says so besides Tremaine? Who did the research and who compiled the figures? And why is it that the germ plasm is already used to machines, but won't become accustomed to their noise for "at least three more generations"?

Other interesting items turn up about two to a page. A bit of slightly unorthodox etymology, for example: "Please note that the word generation could easily be spelled out as *gene-ration*, and the word *genius* could as easily have been developed as *genei-us*." I'm reminded of a character writing for one of your competitors who had a universal alphabet, by the use of which the "true meaning" of any word could be understood—A meant animal, B meant be, C meant see, and so on.

What all this has been leading up to, apparently, is this statement about the atom-bomb problem: "Once we think our way through to understanding, fear fades because it is simply the defensive reaction of instinct against the unknown." How comforting. We needn't be afraid of the bogeyman because there really isn't any bogeyman. We needn't be afraid of the atom bomb bcause— Well, why?

I guess the reason is that a lot of Japanese were volatilised, but after all the rest of them don't have thought police any more. Or maybe Tremaine means that in another fifty years or so we'll all be used to the sound of atomic concussions. Born with plutonium ingots in our mouths, so to speak.

Next issue, I see Tremaine is going to tell us how we can by-pass the tedious methods of vocational counsellors by tabulating the professions, hobbies and recreations of our one hundred and twenty-six most immediate ancestors. I'm looking forward to that.—
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[*Turn page*]


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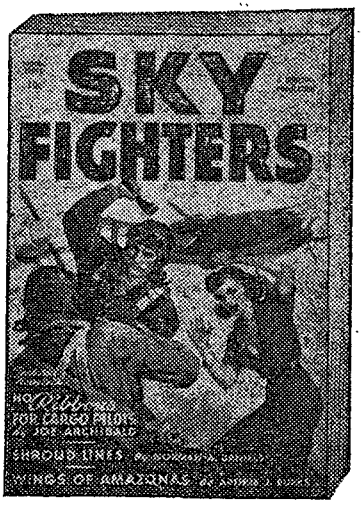


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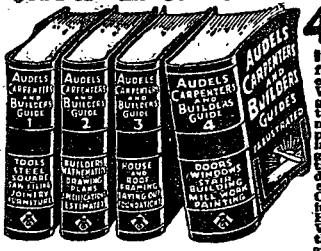

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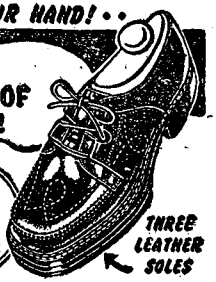


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Brother, were you bitten by an Orlin or something! But primitive as the articles may seem to your advanced New-School-for-Research thinking, they do start wheels rolling in the minds of a lot of readers of all ages. Which does no one any harm. And we were on the wagon (yes, the water wagon!) while negotiating for those stories. Maybe, like General Hooker at the battle of Chancellorsville, we never shoulda quit the stuff.

## DR. HECKLE

### by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Editor: Listen carefully. Dr. Hyde is about to prescribe. What is he prescribing? Why a shot in the arm or a bump on the head or something just as effective to cure editors and writers of their child-mutant complex that they seem to have recently acquired.

I read "Fuzzy Head" and it was pretty good. Then I started "A Child is Crying". After the first paragraph I groaned to myself and thought, "#,$,%,*,"! Nevertheless I finished the story and thought it the best of the shorts.

Two shorts and a half hour later, I started "Schizophrenic". Brother, that was most definitely all. Again I thought some very unpleasant thoughts, finished the story, went to the basement, opened the furnace door and started a nice hot fire. No, I didn't through the mag in, but one more of those child-mutant stories and I would of.

Seriously, Ed., don't you think that three out of six is a little too much. I suggest you change the editorial to read "dictatorship *and* child-mutant stories are taboo" at least if you're going to have three per issue.

As for the rest of the shorts, "Knock" was a good twist. "The Off Season"—no comment except what's with Bradbury and this marsphobia? Doesn't the guy know there're other planets? "A Horse On Me"—well, you should know my thoughts on series by this time. This was the second Orig Prem, let's not have another.

The others: "The Mobius Trail"—just one comment, "WHY?" You can take that any way you want. "Fruits Of The Agathon"—fair. "240,000 Miles Straight Up"—another fair one until the ending, after that it was poor. You know, there was a mystery writer, I think it was S.S. Van Dine, who said that the murder in a mystery story should never turn out to be a suicide because the reader always feels cheated. It's the same way when the story turns out to be a dream. It's an anti-climax, the trick is so old it had white hair fifty years ago, and besides that it stinks.

The lead novel was good. It had nice ideas, it was well written, and well ploted, but it lacked something. I don't know what, except it gave me that I've-been-here-before feeling, and seemed to have that hurry-up-and-finish-so-you-can-start-writing-the-next-one attitude on the part of the writer.

Your point of dictatorship was well taken.—*400 East Eight St., Beardstown, Ill.*

In response to your query that we had too many child stories in the December TWS, we can only answer meekly, "Yes."

Which brings us—halle—alas-to the end of another session. On the whole it seemed to us a good one. Keep it up and we'll keep pounding away at this end. Remember, those of you immersed in dialectics, it's all in fun.

—THE EDITOR.

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# The FRYING PAN

## A REVIEW OF FANZINES

WE are greeted with a nice fresh batch of the ubiquitous SAP-ZINES sent in by Lloyd Alpaugh, the sage of Somerville (New Jersey, Route No. 4, and shall hereby dissect same. Also included were a FANTASY TIMES for November, 1941, a FANTASY REPORTER (now defunct) for June, 1942, and an irate "white paper" assailing anti-scientific operating at about the same time within the limits of organized science fiction—this last under the imprint of R. van Houten, P. Duncan and Max Bart of Flushing, that old hydraulic community out Long Island way.

After delivering a clarion call in behalf of stf, the "white paper"—no longer, alas, white in hue, issues its call to arms in capital letters, to-wit:

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For a whole slue of paragraphs thereafter this panegyric waxes exceeding vague about just what these destructive forces are. Finally it emerges that the authors are disturbed because some kids on the block have been giving them the old bazoo for reading the stuff, also for claiming its purpose was entertainment solely. The rest of the paper is taken up by a plea for a united front of

[*Turn page*]


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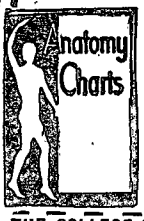


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". . . . fans, Esperantists, Michelists, Technocrats, science-hobbyists and Futurians to units and defend stf from said borings from without and within.

A veritable tocsin—in definite need of an anti-toxin.

## A Neat Newzine

The FANTASY TIMES is a neat little newzine, featuring (for November, 1941), an assault on the comics for stealing the services of Otto Binder and Manly Wade Wellman from legitimate stf authorship, considerable local fangab and an unequivocal denial by F. Orlin Tremaine that he is or ever was Warner Van Lorne. The December issue contains a whole flock of prozine announcements and an unequivocal denial by Dr. E. E. Smith of SKYLARK fame that he is or ever was Norman L. Knight, who wouldn't have known a Skylark when he saw one.

The FANTASY REPORTER is a modest little one-sheet discreetly adorned with a couple of demi-barrels of red ink in which Van Houten exposes Technology as a Fascist ideology. They did a lot of screaming in the good old days, methinks.

## Wanna Buy a Futurephoto?

As a veteran contributor to school and college "humor" magazines, we believed ourselves fairly well immunized to the incredible gaucheries of sophomoric wit—but once in awhile a fanzine comes up with something which stops us colder than absolute zero.

In this case, a couple of SAPs, open their magazine, yclept TIMEWARP, with the following zestful bit of crossfire by way of introduction to whatever readers they win beyond us and our call to duty.

Says Georgie Young of Arthur Rapp, "You know him. The Pipe that Smokes Like a Man. He still doesn't know how he got roped into this organization" (SAPS).

And says Arthur Rapp of Georgie Young, "Better known as George. If you were sober enough at the Torcon (Toronto STF Convention of last summer) you recall George—he was the guy with the helicopter who kept trying to sell Futurefotos. By the way, anybody in the audience wanna buy a Futurefoto?"

The answer, of course, is a resounding NO! However, the boys partially redeem themselves with a manifesto in favor of the



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Scientifictional North American Fantasy Union—SNAFU for short.

However, younger fans such as Art and George rate a certain degree of tolerance, at least immediately after meals. So what can you do when a mature (?) fan and pro veteran such as Wilson "Bob" Tucker, in his BLOOMINGTON NEWS LETTER (an otherwise innocuous sheet) comes up with this?

As long ago as March of this year a California farm bureau director told his constituents that scientists at California Polytech had developed a new substance called 'rootin' designed as an antidote to radioactivity from those bombs. 'Rootin,' said the director, would be made public by official announcement very soon. That was eight months ago.

We've noticed a great lack of tootin' for rootin.

Oh, well, even this strangely unfunny alleged gag pales beside that of another fan veteran, Joe Kennedy, who labels his SAP-Sine, ONE SHEET IN THE WIND, "A Gelded Octopus Publication." May you be drowned in sepia for that one, Joe.

### The Keynoter's Editorial

Harold Cheney Jr., whose KEYNOTER is published at 584 East Monroe Street, Little Falls, New York, comes up with a literally "stunning" editorial in the Fall, 1948, issue of his pride and joy. In brief he says—

"Donning my robes of smug self-righteousness, I shall put in my two cents' worth in the———affair. As usual I shall attempt to take a point of view more unbiased than those used by the other SAPS who have passed judgment on ———.

"Now I am an anti-bigot. . . . I didn't see ———'s letters . . . until a short while ago—It's bad, yes, and it is sad, too. But such being ———'s beliefs, must be respected for that and his courage in stating his beliefs in these times . . . is indicative that his is not a weak character. . . .

"I presume he was born . . . in the South . . .

[*Turn page*]

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his whole education . . . and thinking came from that area. An area where the poor white must compete against the Negro . . . where sheer economics and tradition, not morality, underline this basic conflict. . . .

"If the other members of the SAPS really want to advance the cause of human brotherhood, then let them greet ——— with understanding rather than with tar and feathers. Fanning the fires of ———'s intolerance is no way to destroy it. . . . You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

Somewhere in the above editorial, crude and amateurish though it may be in spots, we seem to detect a pretty swell spirit. Too bad there aren't more Cheneys both in and out of fandom. If there were we'd have fewer ———s.

## A Final Shot

The final shot from our sniper's rifle this time is directed against Wallace Shore, Box No. 1565, Billings, Montana, whose THE AMTORIAN contains the following screed—

> HELP! HELP!
> The Amtorian needs contributions of written material. and NEEDS it bad.
>
> If the Amtorian is going to have anything to read in it at all, will need contributions from other people besides the editor. Maybe you won't like what the editor writes; if not, tell us so. The editor will be about run down when he gets the first issue out anyway, so you readers could be a big help by mailing letters or information to us.

You don't need an editor, Wally—you need an eight-year clock.

—THE EDITOR.

---

*"The crest and crowning of all good,*
*Life's final star, is Brotherhood."*

—Edwin Markham

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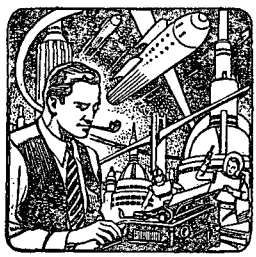
# SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

**THE CARNELIAN CUBE by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, The Gnome Press, 421 Claremont Parkway, New York 57, New York.**

The very strange saga of Arthur Cleveland Finch, archeologist of poetic leanings who, wearied with cozening the motion picture magnate financing his "dig" in what once was Cappadocia, takes advantage of an ancient engraved talisman to dream himself into what he hopes is a better world.

His first effort results in his entering a world of utter logic—as house poet for a



banker's settlement in Kentucky, where he promptly gets into a sweet jam by composing a banquet ode to be read in honor of the boss-banker's wife. Finch, defying the logic of the strange world in which he finds himself and unable to come up with a rhyme for Orange, writes his ode to the banker's second-grade wife, named Ulalie and gets into plenty of woe.

Fed up with logic he manages to regain possession of the carnelian cube and dream himself into a world of unbridled individualism, where he fouls up a crew race in a hilarious Memphis episode, authors a plagiaristic volume of poetic "montage" and is ultimately trapped in the boudoir of the plush and operatic lady friend of the ruthless bigshot sponsoring him. This time a materialized delirium-tremens creature named Roddy has to help him out.

But he does not get back to his "dig"—

[*Turn page*]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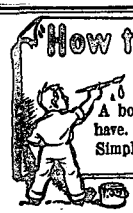

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awakening this time in a world where art and science reign supreme—to such an extent that he finds himself partaking in a Babylonian spectacle which becomes much too real as he is condemned to a very real death—only to regain the cube and the last moment.

Finch is still trying to dream his way into an ideal world at the end—but heaven knows what sort of society he will wake up in. His acquisition of the cube, it appears, had a curse along with it that will make his too-real dream worlds always off-gee.

The job is earthy, talkative, frequently witty. The authors have given full rein to a pair of highly fertile imaginations and the reader does not suffer thereby.

**THE SOLITARY HUNTERS** and **THE ABYSS** by David H. Keller, M.D., New Era Publishers, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Two short novels by one of the current masters of science fiction are here included, both of them in highly, to say nothing of savagely, satiric vein. In THE SOLITARY HUNTERS Dr. Keller considers a near-future U.S.A. in which a private individual has taken over the job of handling all criminals.

He transports them to a volcanic crater of strange proportions where insects grow to gigantic size and feed the criminals to their larvaistic young. Of course this sorry state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue and a former criminal mastermind whose daughter has been taken to crater in disguise, assigns the narrator and his own son to solve the problem.

They do so in straightforward style, rescuing the girl and finding a couple of unexpected surprises when they at last reach the heart of the matter. This is an old-style horror job with social overtones.

THE ABYSS, while also a tale of social experiment, has certain elements of novelty as Dr. John Jeremy persuades a millionaire to back his experiment. This experiment consists of feeding all the inhabitants of New York City a chewing gum which has been specially treated to turn all its users deep back into their primeval memories.

The experiment is successful and the results are chaotic as the city runs amok, establishes a city-state dictatorship and attempts to secede from the Union. An awful lot of people get killed and somehow it seems a bit far to go even in the interests of science and escape fictionally scot free as do its leading characters. But it is far from dull.


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